

MICHAEL FALLON

Missionary of the Sacred Heart

ISRAEL'S
SEVENTH CENTURY
PROPHETS

ZEPHANIAH, NAHUM
HABAKKUK, JEREMIAH

An
Introductory
Commentary

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2011

Introductory Commentaries by the same author.

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A NOTE ON THE FORMATTING OF THE TEXT

The text of the Prophets is presented in narrow columns on the outer side of the page. The commentary is presented in wider columns towards the inside of the page.

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PREFACE

As the title of this book indicates, the aim of this commentary is to introduce the reader to these inspired and inspiring writings from seventh century BC Israel. In attempting to do this I am, of course, dependent on the scholars who have devoted their lives to interpreting these ancient texts. The translation I am offering relies heavily on the NRSV and on the work of these scholars.

For suggestions as to further reading I cannot do better than recommend two websites which offer extensive and up-to-date references to significant scholarly writings on all books of the Bible. The first is a bibliography prepared by an Irish MSC (Missionary of the Sacred Heart) colleague, Father Charles Conroy who has recently retired after lecturing on Sacred Scripture in the Gregorian University in Rome. His web address is <http://www.cjconroy.net/> The second is a bibliography prepared by a Jesuit, Father Jean Louis Ska, who is currently professor of Old Testament Studies at the Pontifical Biblical Institute, also in Rome. His web address is http://www.biblico.it/doc-vari/ska_bibl.html. The directions are in Italian but are obvious to an English speaker. For references to the prophets, go to Section IX. Profeti/Prophets.

I thank Father Warrick Tonkin for the time and care he put into reading the manuscript and granting it the 'Nihil Obstat', and Archbishop Mark Coleridge for permission to publish. My prayer is that this Introductory Commentary will enrich your appreciation of these ancient and inspiring books.

– Christmas 2010

Approximate Dates for Israel's Prophets

For some of the prophets their ministry can be dated confidently. Others with less confidence. Here are the dates I am following in this series.

Volume 1 Eighth Century Death of Jeroboam II, King of Israel 748
Fall of Samaria 721
Hezekiah, king of Judah 727/715 to 699
Destruction of Judah (but Jerusalem spared) 701

Amos 762-750

Hosea 750-724

Isaiah 740-700

Micah 740-725

Volume 2 Seventh Century Fall of Nineveh (Assyria) 612
Death of King Josiah 609
Battle of Carchemish (Babylon victorious) 605
Fall of Jerusalem 597

Zephaniah 628-620

Nahum 620-612

Habakkuk 605-590

Jeremiah 608-586

Volume 3 Sixth Century Fall of Jerusalem and exile in Babylon 597
Destruction of Jerusalem 587
Return from exile 538
Dedication of the temple 516

Ezekiel 593-571

Isaiah School in Exile (40-55) 545-538

Haggai 520

Zechariah 520-518

Isaiah School (56-66) 515-458

Volume 4 Fifth Century These prophets are the hardest to place, largely because they show no interest in history. History held out no hope for fifth century Yehud. Its prophets looked outside history for a salvation that would come through divine intervention.

Key events: Greece repulsed the Persians at Marathon in 490.

Greek city states defeated the Persian navy at Salamis in 480.

Ezra came to Jerusalem in 458 and Nehemiah in 445.

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Obadiah, Zechariah 9-14 and Joel appear to belong to the first half of the century

Malachi and Jonah appear to belong to the middle of the century.