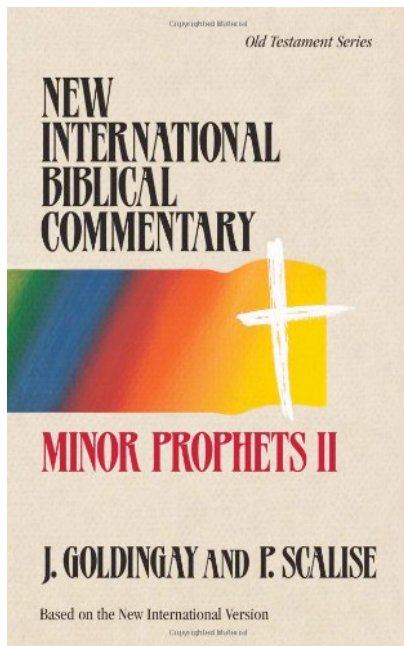


RBL 09/2010



**Goldingay, J., and P. Scalise**

***Minor Prophets II***

New International Biblical Commentary: Old Testament Series

Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson, 2009. Pp. xiv + 392.  
Paper. \$16.95. ISBN 1565632281.

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John Goldingay and Pamela J. Scalise have collaborated to provide an excellent addition to the New International Biblical Commentary series. Goldingay's work covers Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah, and Haggai; Scalise authored the material on Zechariah and Malachi. In addition to an introduction and section-by-section commentary (which usually includes "Additional Notes" that deal with more technical issues and/or disputed interpretations) for each book, the volume includes a brief bibliography ("For Further Reading"), a subject index, and a Scripture index.

The authors' treatment of the material accords with what the series editors call "believing criticism," which they distinguish from "precritical," "anticritical," or merely "critical" approaches to the biblical text. "Believing criticism" employs "the full range of critical methodologies and practices," while simultaneously recognizing "the Bible's full authority for Christians" and aiming "to bring the message of the biblical texts vividly to life so the minds of modern readers may be illumined and their faith deepened." The hope is "to enrich the life of the academy as well as the life of the church" (xii).

The authors have clearly succeeded in fulfilling the stated hope for the series. Their commitment to the meaning of the text and its authority for (and potential impact upon) the life of the church is evident. But even more evident is their careful, well-informed, and conscientious use of “the full range of critical methodologies and practices.” In short, one need not be a believer to appreciate and benefit from the authors’ interpretive work. There is plenty here for both academy and church.

More specifically, in terms of methods and practices, both Goldingay and Scalise are thoroughly grounded in historical and text criticism, and both are very adept at rhetorical-critical analysis (frequently identifying repetition, syntactical and structural features of the text, and other literary devices) and philological study (regularly analyzing the meaning and nuances of Hebrew words and roots and pointing out where words and roots are used elsewhere). Neither author is particularly inclined toward redaction criticism, and consequently there is very little interest in or reference to the recent scholarly work on the formation and possible unity of the Book of the Twelve. Scalise does cite (and the bibliography includes) James Nogalski’s *Redactional Processes in the Book of the Twelve* (BZAW 218; Berlin: de Gruyter, 1993), in which he views Zech 9–14 as a late addition to the Book of the Twelve and as related as much to the whole Book of the Twelve as to Zech 1–8. But Scalise prefers to treat all fourteen chapters of Zechariah as at least a canonical unity, while acknowledging that the book in its final form includes material that cannot likely be assigned to the historical Zechariah, the dates of whose ministry are reflected in 1:1, 7 and 7:1 (see Scalise’s discussion on 182–84). In the process, Scalise makes a strong case for the existence of unifying themes, the development of which can be discerned as the book unfolds. As for Goldingay, he is much more interested in relating the material in Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah, and Haggai to the larger prophetic tradition and canon than he is in discerning possible relationships among the books of The Twelve. Zephaniah, for instance, is “a miniature-scale equivalent to the book of Isaiah” (94).

In terms of material that will enrich the life of the church, several examples must suffice. In his treatment of Nahum, Habakkuk, and Zephaniah, Goldingay makes numerous references to “the superpower” or “superpowers” (see 16, 22, 50, 69–72, 83, 117–18). In the late seventh-century context, for instance, Zephaniah announces the destruction of Assyria, which Goldingay describes as “the first great Middle-Eastern empire” (118). But the prophecies against Assyria in Zephaniah and Nahum, and against Babylon in Habakkuk, have a wider significance, with “implications for the destiny of other empires” (16), including “Spanish, British, and American power” (118; see 17). In particular, superpowers that exalt themselves at the expense of others invite their own divinely willed destruction. The operative concept, as Goldingay points out, is irony (see 25, 118), and it remains a timely concept for analyzing contemporary international

affairs from a biblical-theological perspective (see, e.g., Reinhold Niebuhr, *The Irony of American History* [New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1952]). The converse of the warning to superpowers is the encouragement that the prophetic books offer to the oppressed, and as such a book like Nahum functions as "divinely-inspired resistance literature" (18). Goldingay makes explicit the theological dimension: "Nahum's God is a God of love who does not leave people under the sway of violent oppressors forever" (17).

Two of Goldingay's assertions about prophecy are striking, and they serve to stimulate theological (and anthropological) reflection. In commenting on Hab 1:5–11, Goldingay writes, "The necessity of prophecy arises from people's unwillingness to think outside the box, and so does the failure of prophecy in that people still decline to do so" (57). In commenting on Hag 1:3–4, he writes: "The reason Israel has prophets is that there is always something that needs to be said that goes against people's instincts" (152). In a contemporary era characterized by stifling cultural conformity and in which sustained thinking of any kind is increasingly rare, Goldingay's conclusions are profoundly true, and they constitute a timely challenge to the church if it is going to be faithful to the prophetic tradition.

Scalise's interpretive work also offers material that will inform and enrich the life of the church. In her analysis of Zechariah and Malachi, she identifies as a recurring theme the prophetic challenge to the postexilic community to continue to await the working out of divine promises that had begun to be fulfilled but were not completely so (see 190, 247, 265, 267, 317, 324). In the meantime, the people of God were to pursue their daily living with integrity and faithfulness. As Scalise points out, "the church continues to live in an age of fulfillment but not consummation" (265). So, the prophetic challenge to honor God "by daily living faithfully" is one that addresses "hearers and readers of every generation" (324). This prophetic challenge is perhaps particularly pertinent in an age of instant gratification in which most people, including most Christians, find it virtually impossible to experience satisfaction and fulfillment in the ordinary matters of everyday living.

In short, as suggested above, there are rich resources here for believers, nonbelievers, and anyone in between who has an interest in the books of Nahum–Malachi. As both an ordained minister and seminary professor, I am particularly appreciative of Goldingay's and Scalise's application of rigorous critical inquiry in the service of both academy and church.