



Aim of lesson

For the young people to understand the role that these two prophets played in the closing years of the kingdom of Judah.

Bible background

Isaiah and Jeremiah

Preparation required

Familiarise yourself with the history surrounding these two prophets and find out what the class will have covered the previous lesson. After lesson 19 in the students' books there are pictures for recognising the stories from the major prophets. You should decide how much time you want to spend on this aspect of these books and work the stories in or revise where you think appropriate.

Outline of lesson

The prophets

Explain that a prophet is a spokesman, usually speaking on behalf of God - though Aaron is described as Moses' prophet in Exodus 7:1. Their job wasn't just foretelling what was going to happen in the future. In a way the term prophecy is appropriate for all scripture, as when Jesus referred to 'Moses and all the prophets' (Luke 24:27).

Introduce Isaiah and Jeremiah, explaining why they are known as major prophets - the other two 'major' prophets being Ezekiel and Daniel. We only need to look at the thickness of their books to realise why they are not called 'minor' prophets. It might also be worth pointing out that God's message is just as important in the minor prophets. It's just that there isn't as much of it.

Explain that the Biblical background to the books of Isaiah and Jeremiah is covered in the Kings and Chronicles records and we need to be familiar with the history to understand why the prophets said what they did. Some of the history is recorded in Isaiah and Jeremiah but the historical parts are mixed in with the prophetic and are not necessarily in chronological order!

Historical setting¹

Revise with the class what they know about this period of history (covered in the previous lesson) That the kingdoms of Israel and Judah were separate at this time; Israel, not in the line of David, had a series of bad kings and Judah an assortment of good and bad kings. Elijah and Elisha had prophesied in Israel during the reigns of Ahab, Ahaziah, Joram, and Jehu.

In the students' books is a table showing the kings of Judah from Uzziah up to the last king, Zedekiah. The ministries of Isaiah and Jeremiah were during these times, and both Isaiah and Jeremiah lived in Judah.

Get the students to turn up Isaiah 1:1 and Jeremiah 1:1-3 and highlight on the table the period of the kings that were reigning when Isaiah (Uzziah², Jotham, Ahaz and Hezekiah) and Jeremiah (Josiah, Jehoahaz, Jehoiakim, Jehoiachin, and Zedekiah), prophesied. Note that in the Jeremiah passage, not all of the kings are mentioned but the first and last are. You can also see that Jeremiah was called to be a prophet in the 13th year of Josiah's reign.

You can see from the table that there was no overlap in the ministries of Isaiah and Jeremiah. The reigns of Manasseh and Amon separated the two prophets.

Get the students to complete the key explaining their highlighting and also to mark the two prophets on the timeline at the bottom of the page.

Using the chart, discuss the different spiritual climate that there was between Isaiah and Jeremiah. Note how Isaiah only had Ahaz who was an unspiritual king, but Jeremiah inherited a far more godless situation. Although Josiah had been a good king, when he died the people quickly returned to their godless ways that had been inculcated into them during the reigns of Manasseh and Amon. (It isn't altogether clear whether Manasseh was a good or bad king as he repented in later life but for

¹ The chronology of the reigns of Hezekiah and Hoshea, the last king of Israel, is a bit complicated. It seems that Hezekiah was co-regent with his father Ahaz for several years, so that when 2 Kings 18:9-10 describes the fall of the northern kingdom as being in the sixth year of Hezekiah, this was in the period of his co-regency, and before he came to be sole ruler in Jerusalem.

² Uzziah is called Azariah in 2 Kings 14 and 15

simplicity you could accept God's assessment of him in 2 Chronicles 33:2). The 'G/B' column in the students' notes is intended for them to indicate which kings were good and which bad.

Not only did Jeremiah have to deal with unspiritual rulers, he also was falsely accused of treason, and was often in danger of his life.

Look up together the passages in the table in the students' books, and get them to fill in briefly what happened in the 'Major events' column of their table. A suggestion of what they might write is given in italics.

Isaiah

2 Chronicles 26:1-8, 16-20: these verses describe the rise and fall of king Uzziah, summed up by verse 16. We can see when Isaiah began his ministry in earnest by looking at **Isaiah 6:1-8**. Add this detail to the events column of the table. (*Isaiah - called in the year that Uzziah died*)

The book of Isaiah was written against the background of Assyrian attempts to overthrow the kingdom. The early chapters pronounce judgement – but hope – on Judah but there is a promise of a new world when the Lord Jesus will be the righteous king.

Isaiah 7:1-14: during the reign of Ahaz the kingdom of Judah was being attacked by the joint force of Rezin king of Syria and Pekah king of Israel. Isaiah tells Ahaz that within 65 years Ephraim (the northern kingdom) will be broken (v8). Faithless Ahaz refuses to ask for a sign as confirmation of Isaiah's words so Isaiah goes on to make the prophecy that God would give a sign himself, in that a virgin will give birth to a son who shall be called 'Immanuel' or God with us. This verse is quoted in **Matthew 1:23**. (*Prophecy of the birth of Jesus*).

Isaiah 36:1 and 37:36 In the 14th year of Hezekiah the King of Assyria was Sennacherib. Remind the class of the story. Sennacherib invaded the southern kingdom of Judah and threatened Jerusalem but the city was saved by God who sent his angel to slaughter 185,000 men of the army of Sennacherib. The class may be interested that the story is also told in 2 Kings 18:17- 19:37 and also 2 Chronicles :9-19 (*Assyria invades Judah*).

From what they have learned so far, get the students to summarise the life and experiences of Isaiah in the 'Isaiah' box in their books.

Jeremiah

When we reach the time of Jeremiah the Assyrian power is weakening and the Babylonians have become the major threat to Judah. Jeremiah's message was that the Babylonians would overcome the nation – and for this he was regarded as a traitor.

The book of Jeremiah was written against the background of this threat. It contains the message from God that the people must submit to the Babylonians, who have now defeated the Assyrians, and not to trust in their allies, the Egyptians. This was at a time when the kings of Judah were generally unfaithful and as a result, life became extremely difficult for the prophet. Although the book is full of doom for the people there is hope in the restoration of the people to their land the promise of forgiveness.

2 Chronicles 35:20-25 Josiah was killed in battle and Jeremiah was mourning for him. Josiah had been a wonderful reformer and a great support to Jeremiah. Now perhaps Jeremiah guessed that the son who was to follow as king was not the same spiritual person. (*Josiah dies and Jeremiah mourns for him*).

Jeremiah 46:2 The battle at Carchemish in 605 BC ¹was a major turning point in history. The new Babylonian king, Nebuchadnezzar, defeated the Egyptians. *Babylon became the major world power*. Carchemish is marked on a map in the students' books - see lesson 19.

Jeremiah 38:1-6 This is one of the many times Jeremiah found himself in trouble because was saying that the people should surrender to the Chaldeans (Babylonians) Zedekiah agreed for him to be thrown into a dungeon. (*Jeremiah suffered because of his prophecies*).

2 Chronicles 36:11, 17-18 Nebuchadnezzar (the King of the Babylonians) is recorded as defeating the southern kingdom under Zedekiah and taking them into exile to Babylon. (*Nebuchadnezzar captures Jerusalem*).

Now get the students to fill in the 'Jeremiah' box in their books.

Good news in Isaiah

Explain that as well as the prophecies against an unfaithful people, there are wonderful promises of the kingdom of God and of the kingship of the Lord Jesus. Here are three of them. Get the class choose their favourite from these or anywhere else in the book of Isaiah and write it in Isaiah's 'Good news' box.

- Isaiah 9:6-7 The mighty ruler, Jesus Christ is promised, who will sit on the throne of David and will be a righteous king.

¹ This is not the same battle at Carchemish as the one 4 years earlier referred to in 2 Chronicles 35:20.

- Isaiah 11:1-9 is a picture of Jesus Christ, the righteous judge, and of a world where the animals are no longer wild, and the earth is full of the knowledge of the Lord.
- Isaiah 65:17-25 - a picture of peace and serenity, when animals will no longer be aggressive, there will be no more weeping and life will be extended. (This is a picture of the millennium because there is still death).

Good news in Jeremiah

Jeremiah's prophesies were of coming disaster on the people. However there were elements of hope in his teaching such as the following

- Jeremiah 25:8-11 - This is the prophecy of exile of the nation by Babylon but for a period of 70 years only. Then in Ezra 1 v 1 the words of Jeremiah are quoted as the people prepare to return at the end of the 70 years.
- Jeremiah 30:10-12 - This is a promise of re-gathering, and that the nation will not be completely wiped out.
- Jeremiah 31:31-34 - Here is a promise of forgiveness under a new covenant.

Get the class to choose a verse and write it in Jeremiah's 'Good news' box. Remind or tell the students that the return of some of the Israelites in Ezra's time and refer to the decree of Cyrus in 2 Chronicles 36:23

Relevance to our Lives

God sent his prophets to warn his people time and time again but in the end it was too late - 2 Chronicles 36:15-16. Until then there had always been a glimmer of hope, but the Jews had been too unfaithful for too long.

Extension activities.

- The class might like to be reminded or learn of some of the other events in the lives of these two men. (Isaiah's remedy for Hezekiah's illness, Isaiah 38: 21-22, Jeremiah's visits to the potter, Jeremiah 18-20, the burning of the scroll chapter 36 etc.)
- Being a prophet wasn't an easy life particularly for Jeremiah. At first, neither Isaiah nor Jeremiah wanted to do what God asked them (Isaiah 6 and Jeremiah 1:4-8) and Jeremiah particularly went through much persecution from the kings and the people.
- The end of Jeremiah's life is also interesting. He was not taken to Babylon like Ezekiel and Daniel but continued to prophecy to a tiny remnant who still wouldn't really listen to what God was telling them, and went with them to Egypt.
- It might be worth looking at Lamentations to see Jeremiah's feelings for Jerusalem on its overthrow. However even here Jeremiah shows his great trust in God. Lamentations 3:22-24.