



Aim of lesson

To see how the minor prophets fit into Old Testament history and to learn a little of their messages.

Bible background

Hosea – Zechariah

Preparation required

There is enough material in this lesson to take several weeks, and you need to decide how to approach the subject in a way that will best benefit the members of your class.

There is a game in the students' books. If you decide to play it you need to photocopy the timeline (or print it out from the CSSU web site) and stick the sheets together. The 'cards' need cutting out and you could stick them onto stronger paper or card. You will also need a dice.

Outline of lesson

Remind the class what a prophet is and why these particular books are called minor prophets. (see start of lesson 19).

Background to the time period

In previous lessons we have looked at the major prophets noting that two prophesied before the exile and two during it. In placing the minor prophets we have to cover a similar period of time. Explain this to the students being careful not to labour the point and totally put off those who aren't too interested in history.

Get the class to work through the columns in the chart in the students' books identifying, where possible, the historical setting of each book and to whom the prophecy was made.

Then help them to fill in some gaps in the relevant columns by explaining some of the following details.

- We don't really know when Joel prophesied but the book doesn't mention Assyria or Babylon, or the existence of the kingdom of Israel or a king of Judah; so it could have been about 800 BC or after the exile (we have assumed the later date for the purposes of the chart and the game)
- Obadiah's message is very like Jeremiah 49 so it may have been written about the same time - around 600BC.
- Nahum's prophecy talks of the fall of Nineveh which happened in 606BC. Jonah had warned the Ninevites about 200 years earlier and they had repented at that time.
- Malachi wrote after the temple was built but temple worship was being despised. It seems to be the last book of the Old Testament to be written.

Get the students to notice that the order of the minor prophets on the chart is not the same order as the Bible. It is approximately chronological. Point out that their prophecies often overlapped. Mark the prophets on the class timeline and revise the historical events that were going on in relation to what they have learnt so far. Israel and Judah were having a difficult time. They were being threatened by foreign powers. Many of the people believed God would rescue them, but were failing to worship him correctly. The prophets were sent to warn and encourage the people. Eventually God's patience ran out and the exile and subsequent return happened.

The minor prophets can be split into 3 groups – those concerning Israel and Judah (Amos, Hosea, Micah, Zephaniah and Habakkuk), those concerning other nations, (Jonah, Nahum and Obadiah) and the rest concerning the returned Jews (Haggai, Zechariah, Joel and Malachi). Get the students to highlight these prophets in different colours.

Main message of each book

Now, get the class to discover a main message or key issue of each book using the references in the fourth column of the chart. How much detail you want to go into will depend on your class and the time available. A full summary is given here.

Prophet	Summary of message / key events
Jonah	Jonah was sent to preach to the people of Nineveh, the capital of Assyria. He tried to get out of it, but God prevailed. The Ninevites did repent though. The students should know this story and probably won't need to look anything up.
Amos	Amos was a rough shepherd who preached mainly to the northern kingdom. God was angry with his people because their worship wasn't sincere, and their treatment of the poor was unfair. Amos had visions of the punishments God would send – locusts and fire. He also had a vision of a man standing by a wall holding a plumb line - Israel were like a wall out of line.
Hosea	Hosea's wife ran away and became a prostitute. Hosea was told to go after her, and bring her back. This is a picture of God's unfailing love for his nation in spite of their constant unfaithfulness. Just as Mrs Hosea thought other men would take better care of her than Hosea, Israel went after other false gods and thanked them for God's blessings!
Micah	Micah spoke against idolatry, cruelty and oppression, and warned of coming judgements.
Nahum	The three chapters are a vividly told poem celebrating the destruction of Nineveh, which Nahum prophesied was imminent. The prophecy tells us that a Babylonian attack was to come. The detail is very graphic.
Habakkuk	Habakkuk asks the question 'why did God let the wicked Babylonians appear to prosper and punish God's people?' God answers by showing him that despite what was happening at the time his plan will triumph overall.
Zephaniah	Through Zephaniah God warned that he would punish Israel's neighbours for their false religion, violence and fraud, and that Judah and Jerusalem would be punished too.
Obadiah	The shortest book of the Old Testament. Edom, Israel's Arab neighbour and enemy, rejoiced when she was captured. Obadiah foretells that Edom and all Israel's enemies will be destroyed.
Haggai	Haggai, with Zechariah, prophesied to the returned exiles encouraging them to rebuild the temple and place their trust in God. Although the people had been back for some time the temple had not been rebuilt, as they were distracted by the enemies around them, and had become too comfortable and materialistic. Haggai encouraged them to 'consider your ways'. They did respond, and the temple was finished.
Zechariah	A series of visions to encourage the people to rebuild the temple. Many of them relate to future events leading up to the kingdom.
Joel	This is a book about judgement - the day of the Lord. It describes a terrible plague of locusts and a drought - this is a picture of what would happen to Israel if she did not turn back to God.
Malachi	The old priesthood having failed, Malachi looks ahead to the coming of a better priest who will come in judgement on the wicked, but with blessings for the faithful.

A completed student's chart

Prophet	When?	Spoken to	Summary of message / key events
Jonah	2 Kings 14:23,25 Amaziah	Nineveh	God wanted Jonah to go to Nineveh but he ran away. Nineveh did repent
Amos	Amos 1:1 Uzziah Jeroboam II	Judah Israel	Amos 2:6-7, 7:1-9 God was going to punish the people because they were greedy and treated the poor badly
Hosea	Hosea 1:1 Uzziah -Hezekiah Jeroboam II	Judah Israel	Hosea 1:2-9, 3:1-5 Hosea had to take back his wife who had left him for other men. This was to show how much God loved his people and would have them back
Micah	Micah 1:1 Jotham - Hezekiah	Samaria (Israel) Jerusalem	Micah 1:3-7 God would punish Israel and Judah because of their sins
Nahum	around 640 BC	Nineveh	Nahum 1:1,7-10 Written like a poem. God will destroy Nineveh
Habakkuk	Habakkuk 1:6 Not long before 605 BC	Judah	Habakkuk 1:2, 5-6 Habakkuk asks God about why the Babylonians are triumphing and God answers him.

Prophet	When?	Spoken to	Summary of message / key events
Zephaniah	Zephaniah 1:1 Amariah, Josiah	Judah	Look at the headings to paragraphs in a modern version. Warnings for Judah and neighbouring nations
Obadiah	v1 fall of Jerusalem	Edom	Obadiah 1-4, 10 Edom will be punished because they rejoiced at Israel's misfortunes
Haggai	Haggai 1:1 after the return	the returned Israelites	Haggai. 1:1-10, Ezra 4:24, 5:1-2 Encouraged the people, with Zechariah, to start rebuilding the temple again
Zechariah	Zechariah 1:1 after the return	the returned Israelites	Zechariah 1:4 and headings (also Ezra 4:24, 5:1-2) A series of visions to wake the people from their lethargy and to turn from their evil ways
Joel	no Assyria, Babylon Israel or king of Judah	probably the returned Israelites	Joel 1:1-7 God's punishments are described as invasions of locusts.
Malachi	after the return	the returned Israelites	Malachi 1:6-7, 4 The people were despising God with their temple worship. God tells them of the coming of Jesus and the day of the Lord

The Game

There is a game in the students' books which can be used to consolidate or revise what has been learnt. The first two pages are a set of cards, and the next two pages make the board. You will need to photocopy the pages, or print them out from the CSSU web site.

To play the game, set out the board and make a pile of cards for each prophet. Students roll a dice. If they land on a shaded space they may select any of the minor prophets for the time period covered by the square they are on. They take a card for that prophet, and follow the instructions. If there's no prophet (a white space) they go back one space and wait for their next turn. Students select only one card for each roll of the dice and after the question has been answered the card is put aside. It may be best to divide your class into just 2 or 3 groups depending on time.

Although the aim of the game is to be the first to reach the end, it is a game of luck and 'winning' doesn't depend on the students getting the right answers. The main purpose of the game is for the students to identify with the people for whom the prophecies were made so it will be helpful if the students discuss the references together.

Some of the cards which require looking up of references may be open to debate! The teacher may need to intervene if discussions become too heated!

A more able class may like to remind themselves as they select a prophet, 'it's the one that...'

It may be that not all the prophets are covered. If this happens either play again (removing cards that have been used) or simply discuss at the end.

Relevance to our Lives

Point out that prophecies had to be appropriate for the people at the time and are in the Bible because they can be appropriate for us. As you discover things about the book discuss what it would have meant to people then and what it can mean to us.

For example, the Ninevites were prophesied destruction by Jonah, but they repented, and that particular destruction didn't happen. In the same way we are heading for destruction, the grave, but if we repent and associate ourselves with Jesus we will be saved.

Extension Activities

Find a prophecy about Jesus or the future kingdom in each of the books

Jonah

Matthew 12:39-41. Jonah was a type or shadow of Jesus (see lesson 27). He was greater than Jonah, some 800 years later Jesus preached to Israel but they put him to death.

Amos

9:11-15: God promises that Israel will return to the land permanently, and enjoy plenty.

Hosea

3:5,6:1: The time will come when Israel will return to God and recognise his goodness.. God promises to heal and restore them.

Micah

5:2, 4:1-4: Coming Messiah to be born in Bethlehem. Beautiful picture of the kingdom

Nahum

1:15: God reassures Israel that the wicked will not go unpunished, and that a time of peace will come.

Zephaniah

3:13-17: There will be a faithful group in the future, who do the opposite to the wicked nations. They will be cared for by God.

Habakkuk

2:14, 2:3-4, Hebrews 19:37-38: The time will come when everyone knows about God. God tells us we have to wait, but the time will come.

Obadiah

19-20 Isaiah 2:1-4: Israel will again occupy the land. All nations will benefit when (v21) the kingdom is the Lord's.

Haggai

2:6-9: Prophecy of a better temple.

Zechariah

9:9, 14:1-4: Prophecy about Jesus' entry into Jerusalem – fulfilled in Matthew. Lots about the kingdom! e.g. return of Christ to the Mount of Olives

Joel

3:1-2, 2:18-32: Details are given of an invasion of all nations at a time when Israel is back in the land, as they are today. God promised a time of plenty and blessing.

Malachi

4:5, Matthew 11:10: Elijah refers to the forerunner of Christ. Discuss how you know when a prophet is genuine. Deuteronomy 18:21-22. Get students to look up the meaning of the names of the prophets, and see how they fit with the message.