

# BIBLIOLOGY 29 – HOW TO STUDY THE BIBLE PART 6

## INTRODUCTION

1 Corinthians 10:6, 11 – Now these things happened as examples for us, so that we would not crave evil things as they also craved. ... Now these things happened to them as an example, and they were written for our instruction, upon whom the ends of the ages have come.

The Bible is the authoritative Word of God in all aspects of our lives. The Bible is the single source for our worldview and principles of life. We believe that the original autographs are perfect in form and function. We believe that we have an accurate representation of the original autographs in the Greek and Hebrew Bibles. We understand that the translations are good and useful for study, but how do we study?

## REVIEW

We are settling into the biblically mandated method for studying the Bible. We are using the Literal, Grammatical, Historical approach (LGH). This approach respects the text's natural reading flow, follows linguistic rules, and preserves the historical setting while being mindful of the culture. It ensures that the author's intended meaning and the audience's understanding are maintained.

We also saw that we need to maintain a persistent attitude in Bible study:

## ATTITUDES

- Prayer
- Respect for the Word of God.
- Desire to learn, not prove
- Understand our limitations
- Reduction of presupposition

## LGH IN OLD TESTAMENT PROPHECY

### **Introduction**

The Old Testament prophets are sometimes viewed as complex or challenging to interpret. However, by applying a consistent Literal-Grammatical-Historical (LGH) method, anyone can understand the prophets of the Old Testament. This approach aims to understand Scripture according to its plain meaning (literal), with attention to language and grammar (grammatical), and within the original historical context (historical and cultural). The objective is to identify the original message transmitted through the prophets and understand prophecies to the best of our ability.

### **Who Are the Prophets?**

The Old Testament prophets are described as messengers selected to deliver messages to Israel and, at times, surrounding nations during pivotal periods. The “**Major Prophets**” (Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and Daniel) are distinguished by the greater length of their writings, while the “**Minor Prophets**” (the 12 shorter books from Hosea to Malachi) receive the label “minor” due to brevity rather than diminished importance.

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## **Forthtelling vs. Foretelling:**

Prophecy is often associated with predictions about the future (“foretelling”), but most prophets’ activities involved “forthtelling”—presenting messages relevant to contemporary issues. The majority of Old Testament prophecy was directed toward events and conditions of the prophet’s own era, frequently urging recipients to change behaviors and return to belief in YHWH and restoration of the Covenant.

Only a small portion specifically predicts events anticipated in the distant future. Less than 10 percent of Old Testament prophecy writing is futuristic. The student must be very careful not to attribute future prophetic utterances with warnings and encouragements.

## **Common Themes:**

Despite differences among audiences and eras, several central themes are recurrent in prophetic texts:

- **Covenant Faithfulness**
- **Judgment and Justice**
- **Call to Return**
- **Hope and Restoration**

## **Literary Style:**

A significant portion of prophetic literature uses poetic form, characterized by vivid imagery, symbolic acts, and parallelism (repeating or contrasting ideas). Narrative content also appears, such as brief stories or dialogues (e.g. Jonah or Habakkuk’s dialogue). Genres within these books may include laments, visions, direct address, and narratives.

## **Historical Settings:**

Each prophet addressed specific historical circumstances. Many Minor Prophets wrote during the Assyrian and Babylonian periods (approximately 760–500 BC). Some prophesied to the northern kingdom before its fall in 722 BC (e.g., Hosea, Amos); others to the southern kingdom before the Babylonian exile in 586 BC (e.g., Jeremiah, Micah, Zephaniah); and a few during or after the exile (e.g., Ezekiel, Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi). Placing a prophet within their historical context enhances understanding of their message.

Applying the Literal-Grammatical-Historical (LGH) method to prophetic literature involves several key principles: (1) interpreting the text at face value, (2) attending closely to linguistic details and structure, and (3) situating passages within their original context.

## **Begin Comprehensive Reading**

Commence your study with prayer, seeking insight and discernment. Proceed by reading the entire prophetic book—or a significant portion thereof in the case of longer works—in one or two sessions, ensuring you grasp the overarching narrative and themes. Document initial observations considering:

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- The speaker and audience
- Central topics or prevailing emotions—such as anger, lamentation, or hope.
- Notable shifts or transitions in the message, such as changes from warning to consolation or the introduction of new oracles.

Example: A continuous reading of Amos reveals a progression from judgments against surrounding nations to direct indictments of Israel, culminating in a message of hope.

- Amos 1–2: Judgments on Israel’s neighbors and Israel/Judah for transgressions;
- Amos 3–6: Oracles against Israel's injustice and complacency;
- Amos 7–9: Visions of judgment concluding with restoration.

### Establishing the Historical Context

Understanding prophetic texts necessitates careful attention to historical circumstances. Use internal evidence, often found in introductory verses or narrative clues:

- **The Prophet:**
- **Audience:**
- **Date:**
- **Historical Situation:**

Write a brief contextual summary: "Habakkuk: prophet in Judah prior to Babylonian conquest (~600 BC), questioning divine justice," or "Haggai: post-exilic prophet (~500 BC), urging temple reconstruction." Establishing this framework is critical for accurate interpretation and guards against misunderstanding. Recognizing original context is foundational to the LGH method.

### Analyze the Details (Grammatical and Observational Study)

Closely read each section or oracle, focusing on context and structure. Note key words, repeated phrases, and prominent ideas in your notebook—these often highlight the prophet's main message. Track figures of speech and imagery, asking what each represents, and avoid allegorizing; use the context to interpret images literally where it makes sense.

Observe grammar and syntax: Identify who is speaking, who’s being addressed, verb tenses, and logical connections like “because,” “therefore,” “if,” and “then.” Map out these links to follow the argument.

All these books are under the Law and echo the blessings and curses under the Old Covenant. Cross-reference Deuteronomy 24-28 to see how the warnings and encouragements unfold. Look at the New Covenant passages in Jeremiah 31, 33 to see how restoration will be granted in spite of rebellion.

Literal interpretation means understanding figurative language as intended, not forcing allegories.

### Understand the Main Message and Theological Themes

**What is the fundamental purpose of this prophetic passage?**

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**What sin or circumstance is addressed?** Prophets typically responded to specific issues within their communities. Identify the particular transgressions or situations being confronted.

**What attributes of God are revealed?** Prophetic literature reveals aspects of God's character, including holiness, justice, mercy, and sovereignty.

**Is there a promise or hope articulated?** Many judgment pronouncements conclude with elements of hope. Identify any references to future restoration or assurance, including messianic or kingdom themes pointing toward the Messiah.

**Summarize the section's significance:** Synthesize your analysis into a concise summary.

### LGH IN OLD TESTAMENT PROPHECY

Haggai – a brief prophetic book centered on the call to rebuild the Temple in Jerusalem after the return from exile, emphasizing God's promises and the people's obligations. It addresses the challenges faced by the Israelites, urging them to prioritize the Temple's reconstruction as a sign of obedience and faithfulness to God.

- Purpose of Haggai: The book aims to encourage the Israelites to rebuild the Temple by reminding them of their history and God's promises, commanding them to work without fear and promising future blessings. It is set during the return from exile, around 540-520 BC.
- Historical and prophetic context: Haggai is a complementary prophetic narrative that identifies the problem of neglecting the Temple, provides solutions, and outlines God's promises, primarily addressed to Zerubbabel and Joshua during King Darius's reign.
- Neglect and consequences: The people prioritized their own homes over the Lord's Temple, resulting in famine and lack of success due to disobedience, despite their return to the land under Persian rule.
- Dependence on God for blessing: The Israelites' prosperity depended on God's blessing, which was withheld due to their neglect; God reminded them of the covenant with their ancestors to encourage obedience.
- Prophetic structure: The book follows a pattern of problem identification, punishment declaration, instruction, and promise, highlighting two main issues linked to the lack of blessing and concluding with prophecies about Israel's destiny.
- Central message: God demands respect and obedience from His people, promising blessings to those who honor Him and fulfill their duties, affirming His trustworthiness through fulfilled promises to Israel.
- Key term 'bayith': The Hebrew word "bayith," meaning house or dwelling, primarily refers to the Lord's Temple in Haggai, which is promised to be restored with greater glory than before, symbolizing God's presence and future peace.
- Theological principles: YHWH is portrayed as a God of promises who owns all creation and acts with reason, providing guarantees for His people and expecting their honor in response to His grace.