

WHO IS THE AUTHOR OF THE BIBLE?

According to the traditional understanding, held by most biblical scholars until the rise of historical criticism during the Enlightenment (seventeenth century), the Bible was written by some thirty-five named individuals over a period of 1500 years. Old Testament Bible writers include: Moses (the Pentateuch, the book of Job, and Ps 90), Joshua (the book of Joshua), Samuel (the books of Judges, Ruth, perhaps 1 Samuel), David (the majority of the book of Psalms), Asaph (Pss 50, 73-83), the sons of Korah (Pss 42-49, 84, 85, 87), Heman (Ps 88), Ethan (Ps 89), Solomon (Pss 72 and 127, the majority of the book of Proverbs, the books of Ecclesiastes, and Song of Solomon), Agur (Prov 30), Lemuel (Prov 31), the four “Major Prophets” (Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Daniel) and twelve “Minor Prophets” (whose books are named after them, plus Jeremiah writing also Lamentations and possibly editing 1–2 Kings), and Ezra (the books of Ezra, Nehemiah, and 1–2 Chronicles). New Testament writers include Matthew and Mark (the Gospels named after them), Luke (Luke and Acts), John (the Gospel of John, 1–3 John, and Revelation), Paul (the fourteen epistles attributed to him), Peter (1 and 2 Peter), James and Jude (the epistles named after them). Although modern critical scholarship has questioned the authenticity of many of these claims, there is solid support for the traditional understanding.

The ultimate author of the Bible is God – While the Bible was *written* by numerous individuals, the question remains: who really *authored* the Bible? By many and various means the Bible makes clear that the ultimate *Author of Scripture* is God Himself.

The self-testimony of Scripture regarding its ultimate divine authorship is summarized in 2 Timothy 3:16, 17, “All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and training in righteousness, that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work.” It is “inspired by God,” Gr. *theopneustos*, literally “God-breathed.” The picture here is that of the divine “wind” or Spirit coming upon the prophet so that Scripture is a product of the divine creative breath.

All Scripture—not just a part—is God-breathed. This certainly includes the whole Old Testament, the canonical Scriptures of the apostolic church

(see Luke 24:32, 44, 45; Rom 1:2; 3:2; 2 Pet 1:21; etc.). But for Paul it also includes the New Testament sacred writings as well. His use of the word “Scripture” (Gr. *graphe*, “writing”) in his first epistle to Timothy (5:18) points in this direction. There he introduces two quotations with the words “Scripture says,” one from Deuteronomy 25:4, in the Old Testament, and the other from the words of Jesus, recorded in Luke 10:7. Thus “Scripture” is used to refer to both the Old Testament and the Gospel accounts as “inspired, sacred, authoritative writings.”

Numerous passages in the Gospels assert their truthfulness and authority on the same level as the Old Testament Scriptures (e.g., John 1:1-

The Bible was written in three languages (Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek) over a period of about fifteen-hundred years. Nevertheless, it displays a remarkable unity. Its writers came from every walk of life. They included kings, military leaders, priests, prophets, fishermen, poets, musicians, statesmen, shepherds, a tax collector, a physician, and a tentmaker-theologian.

3 paralleling Gen 1:1; John 14:26; 16:13; 19:35; 21:24; Luke 1:2-4; Matt 1 paralleling Gen 5; Matt 23:34). Peter’s use of the term “Scriptures” for Paul’s writings also supports this conclusion (2 Pet 3:15, 16). By comparing Paul’s letters to the “rest of the Scriptures,” Peter implies that Paul’s correspondence is also a part of Scripture. Thus “all Scripture,” both the Old and the New Testament, is “God-breathed.”

The Holy Spirit inspired the biblical writers – A key biblical passage which clarifies the ultimate divine origin of Scripture in relation to the human dimensions of the biblical writers is 2 Peter 1:19-21,

And we have the word of the prophets made more certain, and you will do well to pay attention to it as to a light shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts. Above all you must understand that no prophecy of Scripture came about by the prophet’s own interpretation. For prophecy never had its origin in the will [*thelema*] of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along [*phero*] by the Holy Spirit (NIV).

Several related points are developed in these verses. Verse 19 underscores the trustworthiness of Scripture; it is “the prophetic word made

more certain.” In verse 20 we learn why this is so; because the prophecy is not a matter of the prophet’s own interpretation, i.e., the prophet does not intrude his own ideas. Verse 21 elaborates on this point: prophecy does not come by the *thelema*—the initiative, the impulse, the will—of the human agent; the prophets are not communicating on their own. Rather, the Bible writers were prophets who spoke as they were moved, carried along, even driven [*phero*] by the Holy Spirit. Peter’s statement makes clear that the Scriptures did not come directly from heaven, but rather God used human authors to write His Word.

A close study of the biblical writings confirms that the Holy Spirit did not abridge the freedom of the biblical writers, did not suppress their unique personalities, and did not destroy their individuality. Their writings sometimes involved human research (Luke 1:1-3); they sometimes gave their own experiences (Moses in Deuteronomy, Luke in Acts, the Psalmists); they present differences in style (contrast Isaiah and Ezekiel, John and Paul); they offer different perspectives on the same truth or event (e.g., the four Gospels).

And yet, through inspiration, the Holy Spirit was carrying along the biblical writers, guiding their minds in what to

The Holy Spirit guided the biblical writers in what to speak and write.

speak and write so that what they presented is not merely their own interpretation but the utterly reliable word of God, the prophetic word made more certain. The Holy Spirit imbued human instruments with divine truth and assisted them in writing so that they faithfully committed to apt words the things divinely revealed to them (1 Cor 2:10-13).

The human and divine elements in Scripture, the written word of God (Heb 4:12), are inextricably bound together just as they are in Jesus, the incarnate “Word of God” (Rev 19:13). Just as Jesus, the incarnate Word of God, was fully God and fully man (John 1:1-3, 14) so the written word is an inseparable union of the human and the divine.

The words of the prophet are called the Word of God – Though the Bible was not verbally dictated by God so as to bypass the individuality of the human author, except in rare cases, and thus the specific words are the words chosen by the human writer, yet the human and divine elements are so inseparable, the human messenger so divinely guided in his selection of apt words to express the divine thoughts that the words of the prophet are called the Word of God. The individual words of Scripture are regarded as

trustworthy, accurately representing the divine message.

This is illustrated by a number of New Testament references. Jesus says, quoting Deuteronomy 8:3, "Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word [Gr. *rhema*, "word," translating Heb. *qol* "everything"] that proceeds from the mouth of God" (Matt 4:4 RSV). Paul says of his own inspired message: "And we impart this in words not taught by human wisdom but taught by the Spirit, interpreting spiritual truths to those who possess the Spirit" (1 Cor 2:13). Again Paul writes: "And we also thank God constantly for this, that when you received the word of God which you heard from us, you accepted it not as the word of men but as what it really is, the word of God, which is at work in you believers" (1 Thess 2:13).

What is stated explicitly in the New Testament is also indicated by the instances in which Jesus and the apostles base an entire theological argument upon a crucial word or even a grammatical form in the Old Testament. For example, in John 10:34 Jesus appeals to Psalm 82:6 and the specific word "gods" to substantiate His divinity. Accompanying His usage is the telling remark: "The Scripture cannot be broken . . ." (v. 35); it cannot be loosed, broken, repealed, annulled, or abolished. In Matthew 22:41-46, He grounds His final, unanswerable argument to the Pharisees upon the reliability of the single word "Lord" in Psalm 110:1.

The self-testimony of Scripture is overwhelming and unequivocal: it is the Word of God. In the Old Testament there are about sixteen hundred occurrences of four Hebrew words (in four different phrases with slight variations) that explicitly indicate that God has spoken: (1) "the utterance/declaration [*n^ecum*] of Yahweh," some 361 times; (2) "thus says [*'amar*] the Lord," some 423 times; (3) "and God spoke [*dibber*]," some 422 times; and (4) the "word [*dabar*] of the Lord," some 394 times. Numerous times the equivalency between the prophet's message and the divine message is indicated: the prophet speaks for God (Exod 7:1, 2; cf. Exod 4:15, 16), God puts His words in the prophet's mouth (Deut 18:18; Jer 1:9), the hand of the Lord is strong upon the prophet (Isa 8:11; Jer 15:17; Ezek 1:3; 3:22; 37:1), or the word of the Lord comes to him (Hos 1:1; Joel 1:1; Mic 1:1; etc.). Jeremiah (chap. 25) rebukes his audience for not listening to the prophets (v. 4), which is equated with not listening to the Lord (v. 7) and further equated with "His words" (v. 8).

Summarizing the prophetic messages sent to Israel, 2 Kings 21:10 records, "And the Lord said by his servants the prophets," and 2 Chronicles 36:15, 16 adds: "The Lord, the God of their fathers, sent persistently to them by his messengers . . . ; but they kept mocking the messengers of

God, despising his words, and scoffing at his prophets. . . .” The prophets’ message is God’s message. For this reason the prophets often naturally switch from a third person reference to God (“He”) to the first person direct divine address (“I”), without any indication of such a switch (see Isa 3:1-4; 5:1-3; 27:1-3; Jer 16:19-21; Hos 6:1-5; Joel 2:23-25; Zech 9:4-7). The Old Testament prophets were sure that their message was the message of God!

Numerous times in the New Testament “it is written” is equivalent to “God says.” For example, in Hebrews 1:5-13, seven Old Testament citations are said to be spoken by God, but the Old Testament passages cited do not always specifically ascribe the statement directly to God (see Ps 104:4; Ps 45:6-7; Ps 102:25-27). Again, Romans 9:17 and Galatians 3:8 (citing Exod 9:16 and Gen 22:18 respectively) reveal a strict identification between Scripture and the Word of God: the New Testament passages introduce the citations with “Scripture says,” while the Old Testament passages have God as the speaker. The Old Testament Scriptures as a whole are viewed as the “oracles of God” (Rom 3:2). Likewise, the New Testament as a whole is “God-breathed” Scripture. While the Bible had many human *writers*, it has only one ultimate *Author* – God Himself!

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Richard M. Davidson

*The Bible is God's voice speaking
to us, just as surely as if we could
hear it with our ears.*

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