

Comments about the Authorship of the Books of Scripture

PART 1 - Issues related to AUTHORSHIP

Why don't we know who some of the human authors are?

There is a good reason why the human authors of Scripture would *not* want their names attached to the books they wrote. That reason is called *humility*. They knew the greatness of God and the smallness of themselves, and that was all the reason they needed. Even though few ever saw God visibly, in the way that Moses and Isaiah did (Exodus 34 and Isaiah 6), they had the same type of attitude toward God, as Moses and Isaiah had. They desired to see God exalted above all else - even if it meant that they themselves would soon become forgotten.

The place of humility in the lives of God's people

Humility has always been one of the characteristics of a person who truly knows and loves God. Such a person will want to divert the attention of others *away from* himself and *toward* God. He knows that all honor, glory and praise belongs to God, and he will not want to steal any of it for himself. He seeks God's honor, not his own.

Such an attitude is characteristic of *all* who serve God. It is not just a characteristic of a prophet or an apostle, but of *all* who please God and who know him. Such people have discovered that genuine humility, far from being debilitating and degrading, actually affirms human potential and enables people to live life to its fullest - a life that has *eternal* significance. It denies the lie of self-exaltation and affirms one's true identity. When someone lowers himself before God, it places within him the necessary attitude for a right relationship with God - and God himself will lift him up at the proper time (Matthew 23:12).

The very nature of what it means to be a servant of God *necessitates* an attitude of humility. There are many who may claim to be servants, but do *not* have such an attitude. Scripture says they are fakes - even though they may be popular and have a good reputation, and though they strongly insist that they are genuine.

Sometimes a person who loves God may temporarily fall into sin, and may focus attention on himself. But when he comes to his senses and repents of his sin, he will once again desire to give God the honor and glory, and the attention he deserves. A *self-serving* focus could *only* be a temporary contradiction in his lifestyle; for a *God-serving* focus is the ongoing attitude of someone who loves God and desires to serve him.

Relating this to the human authors of Scripture

The human authors of Scripture were men of such character. So we shouldn't be surprised that they often considered it *unnecessary* to include information about themselves. Why would they want to detract from the honor that the eternal author deserves?

As an author of Scripture, the prophet or apostle wrote down the very thoughts of God, the message that God had for his people. In the process of doing this, God was pleased to use the author's own personal writing styles and experiences. From a prophet's or apostle's perspective, to have a part in such a glorious task would, of necessity, be a very humbling experience - and fully in line with the nature of a servant of God. Because of this, it would be quite natural for such a person to *not* want to detract from the divine authorship, by attaching his own name to the final document - and if it *was* included, it would not be the

focal point of what he wrote. As a true servant of God, he would want the attention centered on God (the ultimate author of the Bible), and not on himself. His concern would be that God's message be communicated, not that people would point to him (the prophet or apostle) and say that he wrote it!

None of this means that the apostles and prophets were perfect in all their ways. It was God's grace, not some type of "super spirituality," that caused them to be the human authors of Scripture. (The life of David, and the sins he committed with Bathsheba, are sufficient to show this.) Yet though they may have been guilty of various sins at different times in their lives, in the long run, their prevailing desire would have been no different than any other servant of God. *No* servant of God wants to exalt himself - or to have a monument built in his honor, or even to have a church building named after himself! Anyone who might try this has *stopped* serving God, and (if he is a *genuine* servant of God) is living contrary to his calling.

Note that it wouldn't be necessarily *wrong* for a human author of Scripture to include his name; and in some cases, it might be *necessary*. But when the choice was up to himself, then more often than not, he would see no reason to include it. Bringing attention to himself wasn't his focus.

When is it important to know the human author?

When dealing specifically with the issue of authorship, there are two different factors to consider. First, God will tell us anything we *need* to know - all that is necessary for life and godliness. This means that if we *need* to know who the author is, it will be included in the Word. If it isn't included, it is not important. (Knowing God - the ultimate author - is a *lot* more important than knowing the human author! And the better you know the ultimate author, the easier it will be for you to recognize which books are, and which aren't, his.)

Second, from the *author's* perspective, there is a balance between the *author's* desire to take the attention *off* himself and to direct it toward God (where it belongs) and the *people's* need to know who the human author was. If, for instance, circumstances make it unnecessary for the author to include his name, there is a greater tendency for him to *not* include it. On the other hand, if the circumstances are such that Scripture itself makes it *mandatory* for the human author to include his name (and perhaps his qualifications for writing what he wrote), then the prophet or apostle will *always* include it.

Because of this, we can divide the books of the Bible into two general categories: books that *need* their human authorship verified (and always include it), and those that don't (and only sometimes include it).

What types of books *need* their authorship verified?

We could simply say, "Look at the Bible and see!" This is because all books that need it will have it. Yet as we examine the Word, we can make some basic observations:

First, books that *need* their authors verified would include the prophetic books (Old Testament) and letters of instruction to groups such as churches (the New Testament counterpart to the Old Testament prophetic writings). *All* the books which fit into this first category have known authors.

Second, books that *don't* need their authorship verified include history, poetry, sermons, etc. Some books in this category *do* have verification (such as some of the Psalms), but others have unknown authors. The original recipients of these writings would have known where they came from. But their greater focus would be on the fact that the writings were from God.

The books of Moses have a unique position, and don't fit into either of the above categories. This is because they are the *foundation* for all the rest. Their authorship was witnessed by all the people at the time they were written; and their very "kernel" of truth, the Ten Commandments, was spoken by God in the hearing of all (Deuteronomy 5:22). It is this group of five books that sets the standard by which all the rest would be judged, and even *defines* the need for verification of authorship.

Why would some books need their authors identified?

In the Old Testament, the recipients of the prophetic writings needed to be able to verify that the writings were from legitimate prophets (and *not* from fakes), before they paid attention to what the writings said. In the Law of Moses (specifically, Deuteronomy 13:1-5 and 18:15-22), there are instructions regarding the reception of a prophet's message. If *anything* the prophet said proved false (if it were a sign or a prediction) or if his message turned people away from the God of the Bible, the prophet was a fake and was to be stoned to death. Because of this, the people *needed* to know who wrote the prophetic books, so that they knew who to stone to death, if the prophet proved to be a fake! With his name written within the document itself, once it was confirmed that the author did indeed write it (i.e., the authorship wasn't faked), he could not later "change his mind" and deny that he wrote it.

What about fake writings?

Suppose an imposter wrote something and *pretended* to be a known prophet (whether to discredit the real prophet, or to promote his own false views). The original recipients of the spurious document could verify whether or not the writing they had received came from the genuine prophet. (They could ask him!) If the writing proved to be a fake, they could destroy it.

There is nothing to suggest that this was an issue in the Old Testament. However, in the New Testament, the apostle Paul had a problem with fake apostles writing letters, and claiming they were from Paul (2 Thessalonians 2:2). In the New Testament context, it was not the duty of the church to put the false teachers to death (as it was in Old Testament Israel), but they were to watch out for such people, expel them from the church, and reject their writings. [Apparently Paul also had a special signature he used to identify his writings (2 Thessalonians 3:17), and he also sent his letters by means of trusted friends.]

PART 2 - List of known HUMAN AUTHORS

Preliminary observations:

When dealing with authorship, there are a few clarifications or observations that need to be made:

- 1) It is perfectly acceptable for historical portions of a book to be written by someone other than the main author.
 - An example is seen in Jeremiah 52. We read in Jeremiah 51:64 that Jeremiah's words end at that point. The final chapter - a historical account of what happened to some of the kings of Judah - was appended to what Jeremiah had written.
 - The historical record about the death of Moses (at the end of Deuteronomy) would be another example, most likely added by Joshua.
- 2) It is acceptable for a later prophet or priest to make additions or changes that have no effect on the meaning of the text. Examples would include: updating the spelling of a word (if it changed) or replacing obsolete words with synonyms, adding comments (such as explaining the change of a city's name), etc.

- In Genesis 14:14, the city is called "Dan." However, at the time described in the account, it's name would have been Laish (Leshem). It did not become known as "Dan" until many years later (Joshua 19:47).
- 3) The original readers would have known where the writings came from, even though we often don't.
- Even when names are included, it may be difficult for us, thousands of years later, to know for certain which individual by that name was being referred to. (Example - there are several people in the New Testament with the names "James" and "Jude.")
 - In such cases, we can be satisfied with the fact that we can know the *ultimate* author (God) - and leave the minor question about human authorship to him!
- 4) In some cases, there is general agreement about the identity of an author, even though his name is not specifically stated in the book. Our emphasis here is specifically on instances in which Scripture itself links an author to a book.

The five "books of Moses"

The "books of Moses" are a compilation of historical accounts, the rules and regulations of the Old Covenant, and the words spoken by God himself (Exodus 20:1; Deuteronomy 5:4, 22-27).

As a reminder, these five books are unique, in that they are the foundation or "standard" for all Scripture that would come after them. Though there are not very many direct references about Moses' authorship in the books themselves, their authorship was witnessed by the people. And throughout the rest of the Bible, they are unquestioningly called the "books of Moses" - collectively, and for some of the books, individually.

Within these books are the criteria for acceptance (or rejection) of all future prophets that might arise after Moses, whether or not they wrote Scripture. This criteria even applied to "the prophet" (John 6:14; 7:40) who was more than just a mere prophet, Jesus Christ.

Book	Type	Author's name needed?	Author's Name Given?	Stated name of the author	Comments
Genesis	Law of Moses	No	No	—	This is a compilation of historical records from before Moses' time.
Exodus	Law of Moses	No	Yes	Moses	Three passages refer to Moses writing something: Exodus 17:14; 24:4; 34:27.
Leviticus	Law of Moses	No	No	—	—
Numbers	Law of Moses	No	No	—	—
Deuteronomy	Law of Moses	No	Yes	Moses	Passages that refer to Moses writing something: Deut. 31:9, 22, 24; see also 1:5.

The Old Testament historical books

In the original Hebrew editions of these books, some of them were combined into single books. These are indicated in the "Comments."

None of these books need the author's name included, although one has it.

Book	Type	Author's name needed?	Author's Name Given?	Stated name of the author	Comments
Joshua	History	No	No	—	—
Judges	History	No	No	—	—
Ruth	History	No	No	—	Often combined with Judges (in Hebrew).
1 Samuel	History	No	No	—	—
2 Samuel	History	No	No	—	Combined with 1 Samuel (in Hebrew).
1 Kings	History	No	No	—	—
2 Kings	History	No	No	—	Combined with 1 Kings (in Hebrew).
1 Chronicles	History	No	No	—	—
2 Chronicles	History	No	No	—	Combined with 1 Chronicles (in Hebrew).
Ezra	History	No	No*	—	—
Nehemiah	History	No	Yes	Nehemiah	Combined with Ezra (in Hebrew).
Esther	History	No	No	—	—

*(Note about Ezra: His name is mentioned several times in the book, but not in the sense of saying, "He wrote it.")

Old Testament literature

Some might describe these as books of "poetry," yet much of the Old Testament is written with a poetical structure. This was a basic means for expressing (and remembering) what was being communicated.

As a group, these books explore various issues and experiences that commonly occur in life.

None of these books need the author's name included; although the authors for the Proverbs and some (not all) of the Psalms are mentioned. (These two books are a compilation of numerous psalms / proverbs. If there was a final "compiler," his name is not known.)

Book	Type	Author's name needed?	Author's Name Given?	Stated name of the author	Comments
Job	Literature	No	No	—	—
Psalms	Literature	No	Yes (for some)	David, Asaph, Sons of Korah, etc.	—
Proverbs	Literature	No	Yes	Solomon, with parts by Agur and Lemuel	Some think that Agur and Lemuel were references to Solomon.
Ecclesiastes	Literature	No	No	"The teacher"	—
Song of Solomon	Literature	No	Yes?	Solomon	Some believe the book was written "for" Solomon, rather than "by" him.

Old Testament prophets

For the most part, these books contain prophetic instruction. These are the type of books that *require* the author's identity to be included. (This is listed as "Prophecy" in the table.) However, there are some instances of history or literature - and these *don't* require the author's name to be included. (Books that are described as "prophecy," and which need their authors identified, may also contain sections of history.)

Note that "prophecy" includes not only the telling of *future* events, but also instruction and correction that is applicable to the *present* situation (that is, at the time of the writing).

In the Hebrew Bible, the twelve books from Hosea through Malachi are considered one book: "The Twelve."

Book	Type	Author's name needed?	Author's Name Given?	Stated name of the author	Comments
Isaiah	Prophecy	Yes	Yes	Isaiah	—
Jeremiah	Prophecy	Yes	Yes (but see the comments)	Jeremiah	Chapter 52, a historical account, has an unknown author.
Lamentations	Literature	No	No	—	Often connected with Jeremiah (in Hebrew).
Ezekiel	Prophecy	Yes	Yes	Ezekiel	—
Daniel	History and Prophecy	Yes	Yes	Daniel (in second half of book)	First half - history; second half - prophecy.
Hosea	Prophecy	Yes	Yes	Hosea	—
Joel	Prophecy	Yes	Yes	Joel	—
Amos	Prophecy	Yes	Yes	Amos	—
Obadiah	Prophecy	Yes	Yes	Obadiah	—
Jonah	History	No	No	—	—

Book	Type	Author's name needed?	Author's Name Given?	Stated name of the author	Comments
Micah	Prophecy	Yes	Yes	Micah	—
Nahum	Prophecy	Yes	Yes	Nahum	—
Habakkuk	Prophecy	Yes	Yes	Habakkuk	—
Zephaniah	Prophecy	Yes	Yes	Zephaniah	—
Haggai	Prophecy	Yes	Yes	Haggai	—
Zechariah	Prophecy	Yes	Yes	Zechariah	—
Malachi	Prophecy	Yes	Yes	Malachi	—

New Testament historical books

Though there is little debate about the authorship of these books, the names of the authors are not specifically mentioned in the books themselves. But being history, it doesn't matter.

Book	Type	Author's name needed?	Author's Name Given?	Stated name of the author	Comments
Matthew	History	No	No	—	—
Mark	History	No	No	—	—
Luke	History	No	No	—	—
John	History	No	No	—	—
Acts	History	No	No	—	—

New Testament epistles, letters, prophecy, etc.

The majority of these books are normally called "epistles," though there are significant differences in the structures and intended purposes of some.

Most of these books contain apostolic instruction to churches or groups of Christians, and are the New Testament counterpart to the Old Testament prophets. In the table, the term "Instructions to churches" is used. The term "Prophecy" is reserved for the book of Revelation, which has a greater focus on future events. All of these books need their authors identified.

The books identified as "Personal letters" are somewhat different. These are written to individuals, though sometimes others are also invited to read them (example - Philemon 1:2). As personal letters, they would need some type of identification, so that their recipients would know who they came from (even if it was a description that the recipient would have understood, rather than an actual name - see 2 John and 3 John). From this perspective, the *need* for the author's identification would not be as necessary as for the books of prophecy and the "instructions to churches." However, since, in the long run, God intended these letters to provide instruction for the whole church, the author's identity serves a double purpose. Because of this, in the chart, the "Author's name needed?" question is answered as "yes," but it is placed in parentheses.

Two books are *structurally different* from the other "epistles," and appear to be sermons, or something of a similar nature. They may have been spoken (or read) directly to the recipients, and would not need their authors indicated within the text.

Book	Type	Author's name needed?	Author's Name Given?	Stated name of the author	Comments
Romans	Instructions to churches	Yes	Yes	Paul	—
1 Corinthians	Instructions to churches	Yes	Yes	Paul	—
2 Corinthians	Instructions to churches	Yes	Yes	Paul	—
Galatians	Instructions to churches	Yes	Yes	Paul	—
Ephesians	Instructions to churches	Yes	Yes	Paul	—
Philippians	Instructions to churches	Yes	Yes	Paul	—
Colossians	Instructions to churches	Yes	Yes	Paul	—
1 Thessalonians	Instructions to churches	Yes	Yes	Paul	—
2 Thessalonians	Instructions to churches	Yes	Yes	Paul	—
1 Timothy	Personal letter	(Yes)	Yes	Paul	—
2 Timothy	Personal letter	(Yes)	Yes	Paul	—
Titus	Personal letter	(Yes)	Yes	Paul	—
Philemon	Personal letter	(Yes)	Yes	Paul	—
Hebrews	Probable sermon	No	No	—	An example of preaching from the Old Testament
James	Instructions to churches	Yes	Yes	James	—
1 Peter	Instructions to churches	Yes	Yes	Peter	—
2 Peter	Instructions to churches	Yes	Yes	Peter	—
1 John	Probable sermon	No	No	—	—
2 John	Personal letter	(Yes)	Yes	The elder	—
3 John	Personal letter	(Yes)	Yes	The elder	—
Jude	Instructions to churches	Yes	Yes	Jude	—
Revelation	Prophecy	Yes	Yes	John	—