

IS THE BIBLE TRULY THE WORD OF GOD?

0. INTRODUCTION

When asked who authored the Bible, Christians typically answer, God. However, this claim is accompanied by a wide variety of ideas about how God actually exercised His authorship. Except for a small portion of the Bible where, according to the record, the text was likely dictated directly by a Higher Power the issue of authorship is not a simple matter.

1. WHAT THE BIBLE ITSELF SAYS

Regarding God's authorship, the Bible says this:

2Ti 3:16	<i>"All Scripture is inspired of God and beneficial for teaching, for reproving, for setting things straight for disciplining in righteousness." [NWT]</i>
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The translation of the original Greek word as **inspiration** seems very apt in our modern language. For example, if an event inspires a composer to write a symphony, that event is not the author of the symphony. This must also have been the case with the inspiration for the writing of the Bible. How can we claim this? The Bible further explains its origin with a text that is somewhat more difficult to translate:

2Pe 1:20,21	<i>"Above all, you must understand that no prophecy of Scripture came about by the prophet's own interpretation of things. For prophecy never had its origin in the human will, but prophets, though human, spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit." [NIV]</i>
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There is actually no mention here of God directly communicating or dictating anything to people, although such instances did occur. Biblical texts rather emphasize the fact that the prophets were driven by a kind of **spiritual** impulse. In the case of true prophets, it was never an **unholy** (false, impure) spirit, but rather **a holy spirit**, which is also called **God's spirit** or one that comes from God (1Jo 4:1). Can this be understood in any way?

1.1. Stylistic Means

To be honest, we cannot claim that the Bible commands respect on its own from a non-believing reader. To today's studious reader, some biblical passages must seem very primitive, even delusional at times. But try to put yourself in the context in which the Bible was written.

Although the Bible was written primarily by educated people, they were limited to the simple languages of the time, and therefore describing the human psyche, motives, motivations, their causes, etc. was much more difficult then than it is today. These languages were not even sufficient for an accurate description of the social laws with which the Bible deals. The writers of the Bible, i.e. people whose understanding far surpassed their time, were in a difficult situation. To express their ideas, they had to use similes (symbols), approximate and generalizing terms, or arrive at an expression through somewhat clumsy descriptions.

That is why, when reading such texts today, one may get the impression that the Bible is written in a mysterious language of allegories. A typical example of such complications is the frequently used term **spirit**. The word "spirit" is not an unambiguous term in the Bible; it rather refers to a group of objects, beings, or phenomena that were unknown or undefined at the time.¹ The precise meaning of this term in a given passage can therefore be only roughly inferred from the context. Nevertheless, even such biblical texts contain a specific meaning.

1.2. So, What Was the Point Here?

From what the cited texts actually contain regarding God's authorship of the Bible, it is truly impossible to draw unambiguous conclusions. While the texts assert that God was somehow involved in the writing of the Bible, they do not explain how. For now, we can only state that the impulse toward prophecy that is, what evoked (stimulated, inspired, aroused) in the person in question the desire to proclaim a message

¹It was a Christian tradition that clearly defined and firmly personified the Holy Spirit, even capitalizing the term.

to those around them could have been anything or anyone (generally a spirit) fulfilling specific prerequisites (holy, of God).

And so, if we want more specific answers, we have no choice but to turn back to history in the pages of the Bible and investigate the records of the origins of some of its parts. Let us begin first with the actual authors and their personal profiles.

2. AUTHORS OF THE BIBLE AND THEIR SPIRIT

It is clear from biblical accounts that prophets and biblical writers were truly extraordinary people. They did not stand out for supernatural abilities, but in their time, they were exceptional primarily for their motives and inner morality. Compared to the rest of society, they were people with exceptional spiritual qualities. It was precisely in this way that they imitated God, to whom they professed their faith; they possessed what is called the spirit of God.

The Apostle Paul attempted to describe the nature of this spirit:

Ga 5:22,23	<i>"But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law."</i> [NIV]
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These people then advocated for the reform of God's people, not only without expecting any reward, but on the contrary at the risk of persecution, and even cruel torture and death.

Lu 11:47,49	<i>"Alas for you because you build tombs for the prophets, the people your ancestors killed! And that is why the Wisdom of God said, 'I will send them prophets and apostles; some they will slaughter and persecute.'" [NJB]</i>
Mt 5:11,12	<i>"Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me. ... for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you."</i> [NIV]
Mt 23:34	<i>"Therefore I am sending you prophets and sages and teachers. Some of them you will kill and crucify; others you will flog in your synagogues and pursue from town to town."</i> [NIV]
Heb 11:35-38	<i>"... There were others who were tortured, refusing to be released... Some faced jeers and flogging, and even chains and imprisonment. They were put to death by stoning; they were sawed in two; they were killed by the sword. They went about in sheepskins and goatskins, destitute, persecuted and mistreated - the world was not worthy of them. They wandered in deserts and mountains, living in caves and in holes in the ground."</i> [NIV]

2.1. Moved by the Holy Spirit

The motives of the Bible's writers, such as the prophets, are beyond question! Although they may have been humanly biased and made mistakes in their work, they were driven primarily by a desire to fulfil God's will and, at the same time, by the ability to help the nation (humanity). These individuals correctly understood the meaning of God's chosen people (Ge 22:18).

It was that spirit of God, that mindset (an overall spiritual orientation similar to God's), through which life circumstances and various stimuli stirred their minds, thus driving and inspiring them not only to record their thoughts and prophecies, but often to "superhuman" feats.

Mt 16:21-23	<i>"From that time forward, Jesus began explaining to his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem and suffer many things from the elders and chief priests and scribes and be killed, and on the third day be raised up. At this Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him, saying: 'Be kind to yourself, Lord; you will not have this happen to you at all.' But turning his back, he said to Peter: 'Get behind me, Satan! You are a stumbling block to me, because you think, not God's thoughts, but those of men.'" [NWT]</i>
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It is through this Spirit, **the holy spirit**, that the Bible stands out distinctly from every other historical document. And once again, it was through this spirit that the writers were inspired, above all, to write with integrity and to commit themselves personally to the welfare of God's people and humanity, as well as to cultivate other virtues and fulfil the tasks entrusted to them. This spirit further inspired them to record all important information that was of a timeless nature and could serve not only their contemporaries but, above all, future generations (2Ti 3:16; Ps 102:19).

2.2. Abilities of Prophets and the Spirit of God

All true prophets correctly understood their innate abilities as a gift from God to humanity and treated them accordingly.

1Co 4:7	<i>"For who makes you different from another? Indeed, what do you have that you did not receive? If, in fact, you did receive it, why do you boast as though you did not receive it?" [NWT]</i>
1Co 7:7	<i>"... but everyone has his own gift from God, one this kind and the next something different."</i> [NJB]
Eph 4:11	<i>"So Christ himself gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the pastors and teachers."</i> [NIV]

1Co 12:4-10	<i>"There are different kinds of gifts, but the same Spirit distributes them. There are different kinds of service, but the same Lord. There are different kinds of working, but in all of them and in everyone it is the same God at work. Now to each one the manifestation of the Spirit is given for the common good. To one there is given through the Spirit a message of wisdom, to another a message of knowledge by means of the same Spirit, to another faith by the same Spirit, to another gifts of healing by that one Spirit, to another miraculous powers, to another prophecy, to another distinguishing between spirits, to another speaking in different kinds of tongues, and to still another the interpretation of tongues."</i> [NIV]
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Innate talent² or a gift usable for the benefit of God's purposes was thus evidently also included under the concept of the spirit, in the sense of God's holy spirit, which was the driving force of inspiration.

Ex 31:1-4	<i>"Yahweh then spoke to Moses and said, 'Look, I have singled out Bezalel son of Uri, son of Hur, of the tribe of Judah, and have filled him with the spirit of God in wisdom, knowledge and skill in every kind of craft: in designing and carrying out work in gold and silver and bronze.'" [NJB]</i>
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Returning now to Peter's assertion that "...no prophecy of Scripture comes from one's own interpretation, for it was never produced by human will...", we can supplement it with the words of the Apostle John.

1Jo 5:6	<i>"... And the spirit is bearing witness, because the spirit is the truth."</i> [NWT]
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The prophets had to be able (but above all willing) to "look the truth in the eye," to distinguish truth from conjecture. The human will usually resists this very strongly.

2.3. Further Examples of Inspiration

There are indeed instances in the Bible of texts that appear to be verbatim records of the words of angels who conveyed their messages to one of the trustworthy people.

Ex 3:14,15	<i>"God said to Moses, 'I am he who is.' And he said, 'This is what you are to say to the Israelites, 'I am has sent me to you.'" God further said to Moses, 'You are to tell the Israelites, "Yahweh, the God of your ancestors, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob, has sent me to you."'" [NJB]</i>
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However, these were direct communications, and therefore we cannot speak of inspiration in the true sense of the word. Yet the Bible also contains prophecies, and these constitute its most extensive and demanding content. Does the logic of the texts, which speak of mere inspiration of the writers, hold true in their case as well?

Nu 12:6-8	<i>"He said, 'Listen to my words: "When there is a prophet among you, I, the LORD, reveal myself to them in visions, I speak to them in dreams. But this is not true of my servant Moses; he is faithful in all my house. With him I speak face to face, clearly and not in riddles; he sees the form of the LORD ..."'" [NIV]</i>
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Here God Himself mentions one of the ways of inspiration.

2.4. Visual Images

The basis for the central part of Old Testament prophecy was apparently received by people in the form of visions. This occurred both during sleep (Ex 40:5-8; Da 2:1, 7:1) and in a state of expanded consciousness resembling sleep.

Zec 4:1-6	<i>"The angel who had been speaking with me came back and woke me up, as when waking someone from sleep. Then he said to me: 'What do you see?' So I said: 'I see, and look! a lampstand entirely of gold, with a bowl on top of it. There are seven lamps on it, yes, seven, and the lamps, which are at the top of it, have seven pipes. And next to it are two olive trees, one on the right of the bowl and one on the left.' Then I asked the angel who was speaking with me: 'What do these things mean, my lord?' So the angel who was speaking with me asked: 'Do you not know what these things mean?' I replied: 'No, my lord.' He then said to me: 'This is the word of Jehovah to Zerubbabel: ..."'" [NWT]</i>
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Since the prophet does not understand the vision, an angel helps him and explains the meaning of part of the vision. While there are quite a few similar cases in the Bible, they are rather marginal. In the Old Testament, in fact, ready-made prophecies introduced by phrases such as *"This is the word of the Lord"* predominate. The question arises as to what connection exists between visions and prophecies in the Bible.

²According to biblical accounts, God was compelled to enhance or expand these abilities under particularly challenging circumstances. Since people at that time had no idea what exactly was involved, such an act was generally referred to as the sending of the spirit (Nu 11:16,17,25; Ac 2:2-4).

2.5. Inspiration Alone?

Where did the prophets get their finished prophecies? Did God dictate them directly to the prophets? The overall context of the Bible suggests that this was not the case (Job 33:14-18). The answer is obvious and even addresses the questions we posed above. The prophets received visions and insights, again, only as inspiration. God presented illustrations and models of social situations and their development. In doing so, He inspired chosen individuals to reflect and seek the meaning of these visions.

Note: Today, we know that the brain can process information even during sleep, and attempts have even been made to utilize these abilities as a learning method. The problem is that the brain does so primarily on an irrational level, through the language of emotions and symbols. For this reason, dreams usually seem nonsensical to us because we do not understand their symbols. Nevertheless, there is a theory that some visions may have been actual dreams reflecting the issues the prophets were grappling with while awake.

Descriptions of some visions have been preserved in Scripture likely because the prophets did not fully understand them (Da 8:27) and apparently hoped that their full meaning would be discovered later.

In Israel, there were entire groups (a sort of schools) of prophets, within which the prophets collaborated and shared their experiences. They then examined the insights gained in this way, comparing them with the actual social situation and with what they already knew (1Pe 1:10,11).

After successfully interpreting the insights gained, such information was to serve as the basis for proclaiming **the word of the Lord**. That is why the prophets could speak with such conviction; they truly understood the issues at hand. It was as if God were trying to teach people to think independently and creatively.

2.6. The Spirit of Prophecy

And indeed, some experienced and capable prophets prophesied on their own when, based on their study of preserved records, they noticed that God always responds in the same way to similar human behavior, and they felt the need to warn of punishment in time.

1Ki 19:9,10	<i>"There he went into a cave and spent the night there. Then the word of Yahweh came to him saying, 'What are you doing here, Elijah?' He replied, 'I am full of jealous zeal for Yahweh Sabaoth, because the Israelites have abandoned your covenant, have torn down your altars and put your prophets to the sword. I am the only one left, and now they want to kill me.'"</i> [NJB]
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In this instance, Elijah clearly acted on his own initiative and even felt the need to inform God (!), which seems nonsensical from the perspective of the traditional understanding of God. Nevertheless, Elijah was a true prophet; his motivations, impulses, and goals (the spirit that drove him) were pure (holy). God supported him, and very significantly so! After all, Elijah asked for three years without rain, and it happened! When Elijah demonstrated God's power by presenting a sacrificial bull during his confrontation with the priests of Baal, God set the sacrifice ablaze with lightning!

False prophets either lacked the intelligence for objective judgment and prophecy, or they were driven by their own interests, power, influence, wealth, or fame, and simply said what was socially desirable (Jer 5:31).

Often, a simple human conscience was enough to distinguish between prophets. For example, when some prophets warned of punishment and others merely praised, everyone could impartially judge for themselves whether the people were behaving in accordance with God's laws or not.

Gradually, as human mental abilities grew, direct contact with angels diminished until it finally ceased almost entirely.³ For example, when Jesus lived on earth, he gained all the wisdom he taught people by studying the Scriptures. His prophecies were also based on the study of the Scriptures.

Lu 24:31,32	<i>"Then their eyes were opened and they recognized him, and he disappeared from their sight. They asked each other, 'Were not our hearts burning within us while he talked with us on the road and opened the Scriptures to us?'"</i> [NIV]
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The texts and prophecies of the Apostolic Letters are based exclusively on analyses of Christ's message and Old Testament texts.

1Co 4:6	<i>"Now, brothers, these things I have applied to myself and Apollos for your good, that through us you may learn the rule: 'Do not go beyond the things that are written...'"</i> [NWT]
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³During the period around Jesus's life, their activity temporarily increased, not because of the writing of the Bible, but to ensure the conditions for the successful commencement of the Second Covenant. The Book of Revelation, which is actually a collection of visual images, is the exception that proves this rule.

Prophecy in the Bible thus underwent a clear evolution, from the literal recording of statements from a higher power to the independent study, processing, and evaluation of already known facts.

2.7. How Was the Bible Written?

The actual writing of the Bible was therefore not centrally controlled or coordinated in any way but was largely a very spontaneous phenomenon. Evidence of this is, for example, the fact that the Bible contains not only passages describing the same event, but also passages that are completely identical. Furthermore, there are the aforementioned contradictory accounts (Mt 4:18-22; Jan 1:35-42) or even erroneous numerical data (4Mo 25:9; 1Ko 10:8). Such errors would certainly not be found in a Bible dictated or at least coordinated by God.

It must be openly stated that the Bible is a poorly organized collection of diverse writings, written by about 40 authors from different social backgrounds over a period of about 16 centuries.

This conclusion could be almost shocking for a Christian, if they are even willing to admit such a thing.⁴

3. CONCLUSION

Although God is not the full author of the Bible, He was indeed behind its creation (primarily as the inspirer) and thus provided humanity with the information necessary for its successful development. Although the Bible's qualities cannot be described solely in positive terms, it must be taken with the utmost seriousness. In the 21st century, this is true more than ever before, as humanity's existential problems are deepening, despite rapid technological development and scientific progress.

⁴The traditional approach to the Bible, which most Christians follow, is incorrect. Further information about the Bible and its study can be found in the text "Bible Study".