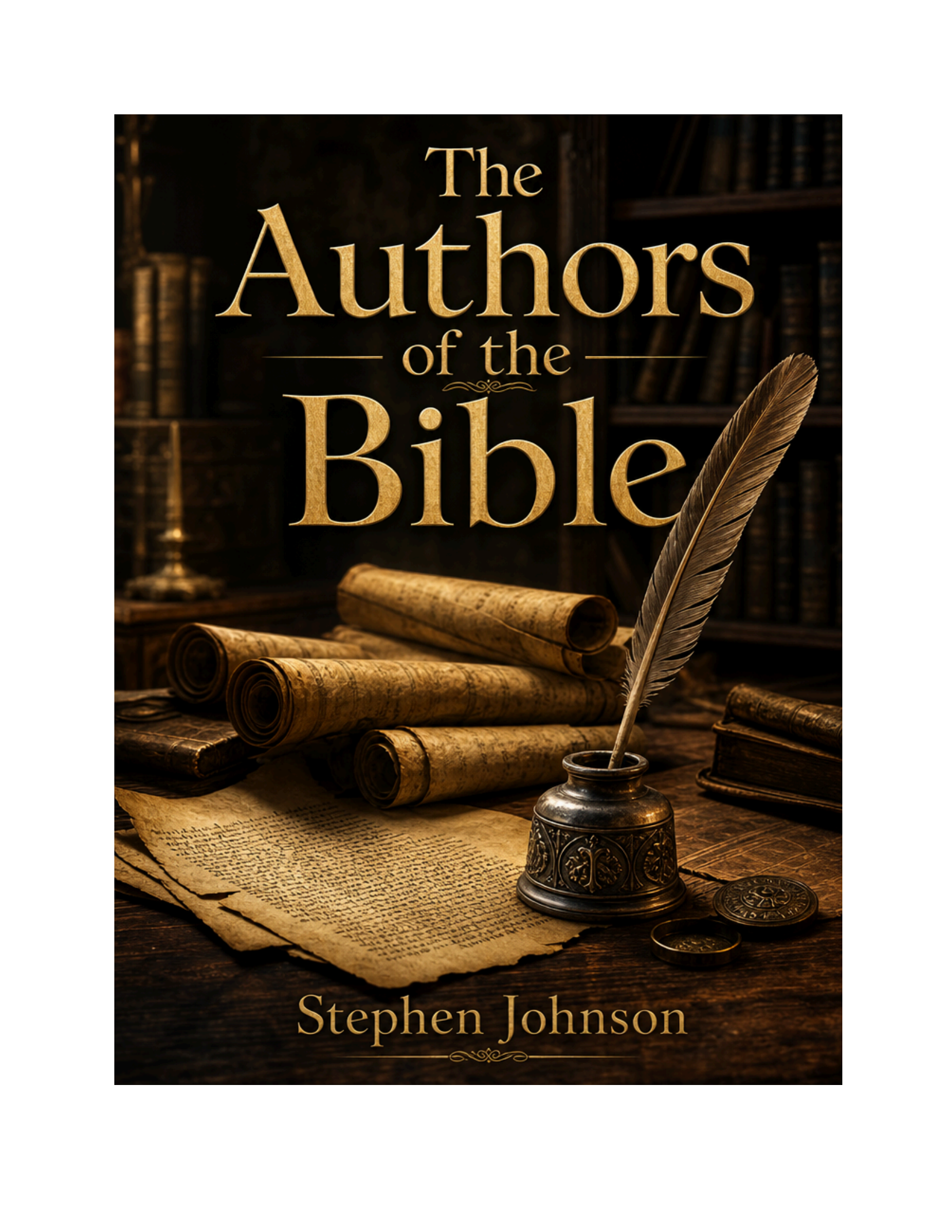


The background of the cover is a detailed, atmospheric illustration of a study or library. In the foreground, several rolled-up parchment scrolls are scattered on a dark wooden desk. A quill pen is placed in a small, ornate metal inkwell. Next to the inkwell are a few coins and a small, open book. In the background, a bookshelf filled with books is visible, and a candle stands on a small table to the left. The overall lighting is warm and focused on the desk, creating a sense of history and scholarship.

The Authors — of the — Bible

Stephen Johnson

Introduction.....	2
The Old Testament Authors.....	3
Moses and the Pentateuch.....	3
Joshua and the Conquest Narrative.....	3
The Books of Samuel and the Rise of Monarchy.....	4
The Books of Kings and the Deuteronomistic History.....	5
The Chronicler: Chronicles, Ezra and Nehemiah.....	6
David and the Psalms.....	7
Solomon and the Wisdom Literature.....	7
Job and the Problem of Suffering.....	8
The Major Prophets: Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel and Daniel.....	9
The Twelve Minor Prophets.....	11
The New Testament Authors.....	13
The Synoptic Gospels: Matthew, Mark and Luke.....	13
The Gospel of John.....	14
Acts of the Apostles.....	14
Paul the Apostle.....	15
The General Epistles.....	16
Revelation and Apocalyptic Literature.....	17
Conclusion: The Formation of the Biblical Canon.....	18

Introduction

The question of biblical authorship represents one of the most complex and contested areas of religious scholarship. For centuries, believers have attributed the sixty-six books of the Protestant Bible to specific individuals whose names have become synonymous with divine revelation: Moses, David, Isaiah, Matthew, and Paul. Yet modern biblical criticism has revealed a far more intricate picture, one in which traditional attributions often diverge significantly from historical evidence, textual analysis and archaeological discovery.

This biographical study examines the authors of scripture across both testaments, exploring the tension between faith tradition and scholarly consensus. We must acknowledge from the outset that many biblical books are anonymous, pseudonymous or composite works, edited and redacted across centuries by communities rather than individuals. The ancient Near Eastern concept of authorship differed fundamentally from our modern understanding; texts were living documents, subject to revision, expansion and reinterpretation by successive generations of scribes, priests and prophets.

Nevertheless, behind these texts stand real historical figures: prophets who proclaimed judgement and hope, priests who codified law and ritual, sages who pondered the mysteries of existence, apostles who witnessed resurrection and persecution. Some we can identify with reasonable confidence; others remain shadowy, their identities lost to time. This study will navigate between traditional attribution and contemporary scholarship, honouring both the faith communities that preserved these texts and the academic rigour that seeks to understand their origins.

We proceed chronologically where possible, beginning with the Torah and concluding with the apocalyptic visions of Revelation, tracing the development of biblical literature across more than a millennium of composition, from the Bronze Age collapse to the Roman Empire.

The Old Testament Authors

Moses and the Pentateuch

The five books of the Torah (Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy) have been attributed to Moses since ancient times, a tradition affirmed by both Jewish and Christian communities. According to biblical narrative, Moses lived during the thirteenth or fourteenth century BCE, leading the Israelites from Egyptian bondage through forty years of wilderness wandering. As prophet, lawgiver, and mediator between God and Israel, Moses supposedly composed the foundational texts of the Jewish faith, recording creation narratives, patriarchal histories, the Exodus event, Sinai legislation, and covenant theology.

Traditional Mosaic authorship faces substantial challenges from modern scholarship. The Pentateuch itself never explicitly claims Moses as author of the entire work, though it attributes specific legal sections to him. More significantly, textual analysis reveals multiple literary sources, anachronisms, duplicate narratives, and theological developments spanning centuries. The documentary hypothesis, formulated by Julius Wellhausen in the nineteenth century, identified four primary sources: the Yahwist (J), Elohist (E), Deuteronomist (D) and Priestly (P) traditions, composed between the tenth and fifth centuries BCE and woven together by later editors.

Contemporary scholarship has moved beyond classical source criticism whilst acknowledging its fundamental insights. The Pentateuch represents a complex literary achievement, incorporating ancient oral traditions, legal codes, cultic regulations and theological reflection. Genesis draws upon Mesopotamian creation myths and flood narratives, transforming them through monotheistic theology. Exodus preserves memories of the Egyptian sojourn and liberation, though the historical Moses remains elusive. Leviticus reflects priestly concerns with holiness, purity and sacrifice, likely codified during or after the Babylonian exile. Numbers combines wilderness traditions with later census material and tribal organisation. Deuteronomy, with its distinctive theology and rhetoric, probably originated in seventh-century Judah, possibly connected to Josiah's reforms.

If Moses existed as a historical figure, he may have established foundational legal and covenantal traditions that subsequent generations expanded and interpreted. The Torah as we possess it, however, represents centuries of development, reaching final form during the Persian period (fifth to fourth centuries BCE) when returning exiles sought to reconstitute Jewish identity around written law. The genius of Mosaic attribution lies not in historical accuracy but in theological claim. These texts embody divine revelation, mediated through Israel's founding prophet, and establish the covenant relationship that defines Jewish existence.

Joshua and the Conquest Narrative

The Book of Joshua, first of the Former Prophets in the Hebrew Bible, recounts Israel's conquest and settlement of Canaan under Moses's successor. Traditional attribution assigns authorship to Joshua himself, the military leader who led Israel across the Jordan, conquered Jericho and Ai, and apportioned the land among the twelve tribes. The book presents Joshua as

Moses's legitimate heir, faithfully carrying out divine commands and fulfilling the promise made to Abraham.

Historical and archaeological evidence, however, complicates this picture considerably. The conquest narrative describes a swift, total military victory and the annihilation of the Canaanites. Yet, archaeological surveys reveal gradual settlement patterns, continuity in material culture, and peaceful infiltration rather than violent conquest. Cities supposedly destroyed by Joshua show no evidence of their thirteenth-century conflagration; some were unoccupied during the proposed conquest period.

Scholarly consensus views Joshua as part of the Deuteronomistic History, a theological interpretation of Israel's story from conquest through exile, composed primarily during the Babylonian captivity (sixth century BCE). The Deuteronomistic historian(s) drew upon earlier traditions, folk memories and local legends, shaping them according to Deuteronomic theology: obedience brings blessing, disobedience brings curse. Joshua functions as an idealised leader, the obedient servant whose faithfulness contrasts with the later kings' failures.

The book likely incorporates genuinely ancient material, including boundary lists, city rosters and etiological tales explaining place names and customs. These traditions were preserved orally for generations before being recorded in writing. The final form of Joshua, however, reflects exilic concerns: how did Israel lose the land? The answer lies in covenant unfaithfulness, a pattern established even during the conquest when Achan's sin brought defeat at Ai.

Joshua, the historical figure, remains obscure. He may have been a tribal leader during the settlement period; his exploits were magnified through retelling. The book bearing his name, however, serves theological rather than biographical purposes, presenting an idealised past against which subsequent history is measured and found wanting.

The Books of Samuel and the Rise of Monarchy

First and Second Samuel (originally a single work) chronicle Israel's transition from a tribal confederation to a monarchy, focusing on three towering figures: Samuel, Saul, and David. Traditional attribution assigns authorship to the prophet Samuel, though the text records his death midway through the narrative, necessitating later supplementation.

Samuel himself emerges as a pivotal transitional figure, the last judge and first prophet of the monarchic period. Born to Hannah in answer to prayer, dedicated to temple service at Shiloh, Samuel received divine revelation as a child and grew to become Israel's spiritual leader. He anointed both Saul and David as kings, reluctantly acquiescing to popular demand for monarchy whilst warning of its dangers. Samuel represents prophetic authority that both legitimates and critiques royal power, establishing a pattern that continues throughout Israel's history.

The books of Samuel draw upon multiple sources, including court histories, prophetic narratives and popular tales. The "Succession Narrative" (2 Samuel 9 to 20, 1 Kings 1 to 2) represents some of the finest historical writing in ancient literature, a sophisticated account of David's reign and the struggle for succession. This material likely originated in Solomon's court and was composed by someone with intimate knowledge of palace intrigue and royal politics.

Other sections reflect different perspectives and periods. The stories of Saul's rise and fall incorporate tragic elements, portraying a complex figure undone by divine rejection and psychological torment. David's rise narrative presents the shepherd-king as divinely chosen, yet does not shy from his moral failures: adultery with Bathsheba, murder of Uriah, family dysfunction and political violence. This remarkable honesty suggests early composition, before David became idealised in later tradition.

The Deuteronomistic historian(s) edited these sources during the exile, adding theological commentary and shaping the narrative in accordance with covenant theology. Samuel's warning against kingship (1 Samuel 8) reflects later disillusionment with the monarchy's failures. Yet the promise to David of an eternal dynasty (2 Samuel 7) provides hope for restoration and a messianic expectation that has profoundly influenced Jewish and Christian theology.

Samuel the prophet likely existed as a historical figure, though biographical details remain uncertain. The books bearing his name represent composite work, incorporating early sources and later editorial layers, preserving Israel's memory of its greatest king and the prophet who anointed him.

The Books of Kings and the Deuteronomistic History

First and Second Kings continue Israel's story from Solomon's reign through the divided monarchy to Babylonian exile, concluding with the destruction of Jerusalem in 586 BCE. These books form the climax of the Deuteronomistic History, demonstrating how covenant unfaithfulness led to national catastrophe.

The author(s) of Kings remain anonymous, though they clearly belonged to the Deuteronomistic school. They drew upon official court records, including the "Book of the Acts of Solomon," the "Book of the Chronicles of the Kings of Israel," and the "Book of the Chronicles of the Kings of Judah," all now lost. They also incorporated prophetic narratives, particularly the Elijah and Elisha cycles, which may have circulated independently before inclusion.

The Deuteronomistic historian(s) evaluated each king according to a single criterion: did he do right or evil in the Lord's sight? This meant centralising worship in Jerusalem, eliminating high places and foreign cults, and maintaining covenant faithfulness. By this standard, most kings failed spectacularly. Only Hezekiah and Josiah received unqualified approval, both for religious reforms that anticipated Deuteronomic ideals.

The composition history of Kings is complex. An initial edition may have been produced during Josiah's reign (late seventh century BCE), celebrating his reforms and anticipating national renewal. The destruction of Jerusalem necessitated revisions, including the addition of final chapters and the reinterpretation of the entire history to explain the exile. A further edition during the exile itself may have added hopeful notes, including the release of King Jehoiachin from Babylonian prison, suggesting possible restoration.

The theological sophistication of Kings is remarkable. The historian(s) grappled with profound questions: Why did God allow his temple to be destroyed? How could the Davidic covenant fail? The answer lay not in divine weakness but human sin. The kings, priests and people repeatedly violated the covenant, worshipping foreign gods, oppressing the poor and ignoring prophetic

warnings. Exile represented just punishment, yet the survival of the Davidic lineage offered hope for future redemption.

The prophetic narratives within Kings deserve special attention. Elijah and Elisha, ninth-century prophets in the northern kingdom, confronted royal apostasy and performed miraculous signs. These stories, preserved in prophetic circles, emphasise God's power over Baal, care for the marginalised and judgement upon unjust rulers. They represent an alternative tradition to royal ideology, insisting that true authority derives from divine commission rather than dynastic succession.

The Chronicler: Chronicles, Ezra and Nehemiah

First and Second Chronicles, along with Ezra and Nehemiah, represent a distinct historical tradition, often attributed to a single author or school known as the Chronicler. These books retell Israel's history from Adam to the post-exilic restoration, offering a perspective quite different from Samuel and Kings.

The Chronicler's identity remains unknown, though clearly a Levite or someone deeply concerned with temple worship, priestly genealogies and cultic regulations. Composition dates to the Persian period, likely the fourth century BCE, when the Jewish community in Judah sought to reconstitute itself around the temple and Torah.

Chronicles covers much of the same ground as Samuel and Kings, but with significant differences. The northern kingdom receives minimal attention; David and Solomon are idealised; temple worship is central; genealogies establish continuity with pre-exilic Israel. The Chronicler drew upon Samuel and Kings but also accessed other sources, including genealogical records, temple archives and possibly oral traditions. Some material appears more historically reliable than the Deuteronomistic account, whilst other sections reflect the Chronicler's theological agenda.

The books of Ezra and Nehemiah (originally a single work) continue the story into the post-exilic period. Ezra, a priest and scribe, led a group of exiles back to Jerusalem, bringing the Torah and enforcing its observance, including the controversial dissolution of mixed marriages. Nehemiah, a Jewish official in the Persian court, obtained permission to rebuild Jerusalem's walls and implemented social and religious reforms.

Both books incorporate first-person memoirs, suggesting access to authentic sources. The "Ezra memoir" and "Nehemiah memoir" may derive from actual documents, though edited and supplemented by the Chronicler. Aramaic documents, including Persian correspondence, add authenticity, though some scholars question their genuineness.

The Chronicler's theological vision emphasises continuity, legitimacy and hope. Despite exile and foreign domination, Israel remains God's people, the temple stands restored, and worship continues according to Mosaic law. The genealogies connecting the post-exilic community to pre-exilic Israel assert unbroken continuity. The focus on David and temple worship establishes Jerusalem's centrality. The reforms of Ezra and Nehemiah demonstrate renewed covenant faithfulness.

This perspective reflects the concerns of the post-exilic community: establishing identity, maintaining purity, resisting assimilation, and hoping for restoration. The Chronicler provided a usable past, a vision of Israel's glory that inspired perseverance under Persian and later Hellenistic rule.

David and the Psalms

The Book of Psalms, Israel's hymnbook and prayer book, contains 150 poems spanning centuries of composition. Traditional attribution assigns seventy-three psalms to David, establishing him as Israel's premier poet and worship leader. The biblical narrative portrays David as a musician who soothed Saul's torment, a composer of laments and thanksgivings, and an organiser of temple worship.

Modern scholarship recognises the Psalter as an anthology rather than a single-author collection. Superscriptions attributing psalms to David, Moses, Solomon, Asaph, the Sons of Korah, and others reflect a later editorial tradition rather than specific authorship. The Hebrew preposition "le-David" can mean "by David," "for David," "concerning David", or "in the style of David," allowing multiple interpretations.

Nevertheless, David's association with psalmody is historically plausible. The biblical narrative consistently portrays him as a musician and poet. His lament over Saul and Jonathan (2 Samuel 1) demonstrates poetic skill. Court poets certainly existed in ancient Near Eastern kingdoms; David may have composed psalms that became models for later worship.

The Psalter developed over centuries, incorporating pre-exilic, exilic and post-exilic material. Some psalms reflect the monarchic period, celebrating the king and Zion. Others lament Jerusalem's destruction, clearly exilic compositions. Still others reflect post-exilic temple worship and Torah piety. The final editing occurred during the Second Temple period, arranging psalms into five books (mirroring the Pentateuch) with theological intentionality.

Various groups contributed to the Psalter. The Asaph psalms (Psalms 50, 73 to 83) may derive from a guild of temple singers. The Korah psalms (Psalms 42 to 49, 84 to 85, 87 to 88) similarly reflect Levitical tradition. Individual poets composed personal laments and thanksgivings. Royal psalms celebrated the Davidic king. Wisdom psalms reflected on Torah and righteous living.

The genius of the Psalter lies in its universality. These ancient prayers continue to express human experience: joy and sorrow, faith and doubt, praise and lament, confidence and despair. Whether David composed specific psalms matters less than the tradition that connected Israel's greatest king with its richest devotional literature, establishing a model of piety that transcends historical particularity.

Solomon and the Wisdom Literature

King Solomon, David's son and successor, became synonymous with wisdom in the Israelite tradition. The biblical narrative credits him with extraordinary insight, an international reputation, and a prolific literary output: three thousand proverbs and one thousand and five songs (1 Kings 4:32). Traditional attribution assigns Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and the Song of Solomon to his authorship, establishing him as the patron of Israel's wisdom tradition.

Historical Solomon ruled circa 970 to 931 BCE, presiding over Israel's golden age. He built the temple, established international trade, married foreign princesses and accumulated legendary wealth. The biblical account also records his apostasy, turning to foreign gods in old age, setting the stage for the kingdom's division. This complex legacy, combining wisdom and folly, makes him a fitting symbol for wisdom literature's exploration of life's ambiguities.

The Book of Proverbs is a composite work, incorporating multiple collections from different periods. The superscription attributes chapters 1 to 9 and 10 to 22:16 to Solomon, whilst explicitly identifying other sections as "sayings of the wise" (22:17), "more proverbs of Solomon copied by Hezekiah's men" (chapters 25 to 29), "sayings of Agur" (chapter 30) and "sayings of King Lemuel" (chapter 31). This internal evidence demonstrates multiple authorship and editorial stages.

Chapters 1 to 9, with their lengthy discourses on wisdom personified as a woman, reflect a post-exilic composition, possibly from the fifth or fourth century BCE. The sentence literature of chapters 10 to 29 may preserve genuinely ancient material, including Solomonic-era proverbs, though final compilation occurred much later. The international character of wisdom literature, with parallels in Egyptian and Mesopotamian texts, suggests that court scribes collected and adapted sayings from various sources.

Ecclesiastes (Qoheleth in Hebrew) presents even greater authorship puzzles. The superscription identifies the author as "son of David, king in Jerusalem," traditionally understood as Solomon, yet the book's language, Persian loanwords, and philosophical perspective point to a Hellenistic-period composition, possibly third century BCE. The author adopts a Solomonic persona, drawing on the legendary king's experience to explore life's meaning, yet clearly writes centuries after Solomon's death. This pseudonymous attribution lends authority whilst allowing radical questioning of traditional wisdom.

The Song of Solomon (Song of Songs) is a collection of love poems celebrating erotic desire and romantic longing. Traditional attribution to Solomon derives from the superscription and references to the king in the poems, yet the work shows no concern with themes of wisdom or royal ideology. The poetry may incorporate ancient wedding songs and fertility liturgy, edited into final form during the post-exilic period. Allegorical interpretation, reading the poems as depicting God's love for Israel or Christ's love for the church, developed later to justify the book's inclusion in scripture.

Solomon's actual contribution to wisdom literature remains uncertain. He may have patronised scribal schools, collected proverbs and established a tradition that subsequent sages continued. The attribution of wisdom books to Solomon functions similarly to the attribution of psalms to David or of law to Moses: it connects the literature to an authoritative founder, legitimating its place in Israel's sacred tradition.

Job and the Problem of Suffering

The Book of Job stands apart in biblical literature, a philosophical dialogue exploring innocent suffering and divine justice. The book is anonymous, offering no indication of authorship, date or historical setting. The prose prologue and epilogue frame poetic dialogues between Job and his friends, suggesting a composite composition.

The story is set in patriarchal times; Job is described as living in Uz, possibly Edomite territory, and his wealth is measured in livestock rather than land. Yet the book's language, theology, and literary sophistication point to a post-exilic composition, possibly in the fifth to third centuries BCE. The author was clearly educated in wisdom tradition, familiar with ancient Near Eastern literature (particularly Mesopotamian theodicy texts) and willing to challenge conventional theology.

The prose tale may preserve ancient folklore about a righteous sufferer, similar to stories found in Mesopotamian and Egyptian literature. The poetic dialogues represent the author's creative expansion, transforming a simple folktale into a profound theological exploration. Job's friends articulate traditional wisdom: suffering results from sin, righteousness brings blessing. Job insists on his innocence, demanding an explanation from God. The divine speeches from the whirlwind offer no explanation; instead, they overwhelm Job with creation's mystery and majesty.

The book's radical theology challenges the doctrine of retribution, the belief that God rewards righteousness and punishes wickedness in this life. Job's experience contradicts this neat formula; he suffers despite innocence. The friends' attempts to defend God by blaming Job only compound the problem. God's speeches validate Job's protest whilst transcending human categories of justice. The book offers no simple answer to suffering but insists on honest engagement with life's harsh realities.

The author's identity remains completely unknown. Some scholars suggest that an Israelite sage influenced by international wisdom tradition. Others propose an Edomite or foreign author whose work was adopted into Israel's canon. The book's universality, by avoiding specifically Israelite concerns such as covenant, law, or temple, supports either possibility. What matters is the author's genius in creating literature that continues to speak to human suffering across cultures and centuries.

The Major Prophets: Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel and Daniel

The prophetic books represent some of the Bible's most complex compositional histories, combining authentic prophetic oracles with later editorial expansion and reinterpretation. The major prophets (so called for the length of their books rather than their importance) span three critical periods: the Assyrian crisis, the Babylonian conquest and exile, and the Persian restoration.

Isaiah presents the most complicated authorship question in the Hebrew Bible. The book's sixty-six chapters span three distinct historical periods and theological perspectives, leading scholars to identify at least three authors: First Isaiah (chapters 1 to 39), Second Isaiah (chapters 40 to 55) and Third Isaiah (chapters 56 to 66).

Isaiah ben Amoz, the historical prophet, ministered in eighth-century Jerusalem during the reigns of Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz and Hezekiah (circa 740 to 700 BCE). He witnessed Assyrian expansion, the fall of the northern kingdom and Sennacherib's siege of Jerusalem. His oracles addressed Judah's political alliances, social injustice and religious hypocrisy, proclaiming both

judgement and hope centred on Zion and the Davidic king. Chapters 1 to 39 preserve his authentic words, though heavily edited and supplemented by later disciples.

Second Isaiah, the anonymous prophet of chapters 40 to 55, ministered during the Babylonian exile (circa 550 to 539 BCE). These chapters presuppose Jerusalem's destruction, address exiles in Babylon and announce imminent liberation through Cyrus the Persian. The theology shifts dramatically: God is the universal sovereign, Israel is the suffering servant, and salvation extends to nations. The poetry reaches sublime heights, combining comfort and challenge. This prophet's identity remains completely unknown, though his genius is undeniable.

Third Isaiah (chapters 56 to 66) reflects post-exilic Jerusalem, addressing a struggling community, internal divisions and delayed restoration. Multiple authors may contribute to these chapters, disciples of Second Isaiah applying his message to new circumstances.

The Isaiah tradition demonstrates how prophetic books developed. A historical prophet's words were preserved, interpreted and expanded by disciples across generations, creating a living tradition that addressed changing circumstances whilst maintaining continuity with the founder's vision.

Jeremiah offers more biographical detail than any other prophet, yet his book's composition remains complex. Jeremiah ben Hilkiyah ministered in Jerusalem from 627 BCE until after the city's destruction in 586 BCE, spanning the reigns of Josiah, Jehoiakim, Jehoiachin and Zedekiah. He witnessed Josiah's reforms, the Babylonian ascendancy, Jerusalem's sieges, and the beginning of the exile.

Jeremiah's message was consistently unpopular: submit to Babylon, accept judgement, abandon false hope in the temple and dynasty. He suffered persecution, imprisonment and forced exile to Egypt. His personal struggles, recorded in "confessions" scattered through the book, reveal a tortured soul caught between divine calling and human resistance.

The book's composition involved Jeremiah's scribe Baruch, who recorded the prophet's oracles (Jeremiah 36). After King Jehoiakim burned the first scroll, Jeremiah dictated an expanded version. Baruch may have continued editing after Jeremiah's death, adding biographical narratives and arranging oracles thematically rather than chronologically. Later editors supplemented the book, particularly the oracles against nations and hopeful passages about restoration.

The Book of Lamentations, traditionally attributed to Jeremiah, is actually anonymous. These five poems mourn Jerusalem's destruction, expressing grief, anger and tentative hope. They may have been composed by survivors in the ruined city, possibly including Jeremiah, but certain attribution is impossible.

Ezekiel presents a more unified composition, though not without complexities. Ezekiel ben Buzi was a priest exiled to Babylon in 597 BCE with King Jehoiachin. He received his prophetic call in 593 BCE and ministered among the exiles until at least 571 BCE. His book is carefully dated, with oracles arranged chronologically and thematically.

Ezekiel's prophecies combine priestly concerns (holiness, purity, the temple) with visionary experiences (the chariot throne, the valley of dry bones, the restored temple). Before

Jerusalem's fall, he proclaimed inevitable judgement. Afterwards, he offered hope of restoration, resurrection, and a renewed covenant. His influence on later apocalyptic literature was profound.

The book's literary unity suggests substantial authorship by Ezekiel himself, possibly with assistance from disciples. Some scholars detect later editorial additions, particularly the final temple vision (chapters 40 to 48), but the core material derives from the sixth-century prophet.

Daniel differs significantly from other prophetic books, combining court tales (chapters 1-6) with apocalyptic visions (chapters 7-12). The book is set during the Babylonian and Persian periods, featuring Daniel and his companions as faithful Jews in foreign courts. Yet the language (Hebrew and Aramaic), historical inaccuracies and theological perspective point to composition during the Maccabean crisis (167 to 164 BCE), when Antiochus IV Epiphanes persecuted Jews and desecrated the temple.

The court tales may preserve earlier traditions about Jewish exiles, adapted and expanded during the Hellenistic period. The visions clearly address second-century persecution, offering hope that God will overthrow oppressive empires and establish his kingdom. The "prophecies" are actually vaticinia ex eventu, predictions written after the events they describe, a common apocalyptic technique.

Daniel, the character, may be based on a legendary wise man mentioned in the book of Ezekiel, but the book's author remains anonymous. He wrote to encourage resistance in the face of persecution, insisting that faithfulness would be vindicated and that oppressors would be judged. The book's inclusion among the Writings rather than the Prophets in the Hebrew Bible reflects its late composition and disputed status.

The Twelve Minor Prophets

The Book of the Twelve (Minor Prophets) collects shorter prophetic works spanning four centuries, from eighth-century Amos to fifth-century Malachi. Each book bears a prophet's name, though the relationship between historical figure and literary work varies considerably.

Hosea ministered in the northern kingdom during the eighth century BCE, contemporary with Amos. His marriage to Gomer, a promiscuous woman, became a living parable of Israel's unfaithfulness to God. The book combines biographical narrative, oracles of judgement and promises of restoration. Hosea's authentic words were preserved and edited by Judean disciples after the fall of the northern kingdom.

Joel is difficult to date, with proposals ranging from the ninth to the fourth century BCE. The book responds to a locust plague, interpreting it as a harbinger of the Day of the Lord. The prophet's identity and historical context remain obscure, though the book's apocalyptic elements suggest post-exilic composition.

Amos, a shepherd and fig farmer from Tekoa in Judah, prophesied in the northern kingdom during the prosperous reign of Jeroboam II (circa 760 BCE). He condemned social injustice, religious complacency and false security, proclaiming inevitable judgement. His oracles were preserved by disciples, with hopeful additions appended after the exile.

Obadiah, the shortest prophetic book, pronounces judgement on Edom for participating in Jerusalem's destruction. The prophet's identity is unknown; the book may date to the exilic or post-exilic period.

Jonah differs from other prophetic books in that it is a narrative about a prophet rather than a collection of oracles. The story satirises prophetic resistance and narrow nationalism, emphasising God's mercy toward Gentiles. The book is probably a post-exilic work of fiction that uses a legendary figure (mentioned in 2 Kings 14:25) to explore theological themes.

Micah, a contemporary of Isaiah from rural Judah, condemned Jerusalem's corruption and predicted the city's destruction. His oracles combine judgement and hope, including the famous vision of nations streaming to Zion to learn God's ways. Later editors added material, particularly the hopeful conclusion.

Nahum celebrates Nineveh's fall (612 BCE), proclaiming God's judgement on Assyrian cruelty. The prophet's identity is otherwise unknown; the book reflects Judean relief at the destruction of their oppressor.

Habakkuk questions God's justice in using Babylon to punish Judah and receives the answer that the righteous shall live by faith. The prophet ministered during the late seventh or early sixth century BCE; his dialogue with God addresses the problem of theodicy.

Zephaniah, active during Josiah's reign (late seventh century BCE), proclaimed the Day of the Lord as imminent judgement, calling for repentance and promising eventual restoration. His aristocratic lineage (traced to Hezekiah) is unusual among prophets.

Haggai ministered in post-exilic Jerusalem (520 BCE), urging the community to rebuild the temple. His dated oracles address economic hardship and religious priorities, promising divine blessing for faithful obedience.

Zechariah was Haggai's contemporary, also encouraging temple rebuilding through visionary experiences and oracles. Chapters 1 to 8 derive from the historical prophet; chapters 9 to 14 are later apocalyptic additions, possibly from multiple authors.

Malachi (meaning "my messenger") may be a title rather than a name. The book addresses post-exilic community problems: priestly corruption, social injustice, religious cynicism and intermarriage. It concludes the prophetic corpus with promises of Elijah's return and the Day of the Lord.

These twelve prophets, spanning four centuries, demonstrate the vitality and diversity of Israel's prophetic tradition. Each addressed specific historical circumstances, yet their words were preserved, edited and reinterpreted by later communities who found continuing relevance in ancient oracles.

The New Testament Authors

The Synoptic Gospels: Matthew, Mark and Luke

The four canonical Gospels present the life, teaching, death and resurrection of Jesus, yet their authorship, dating and relationship remain subjects of scholarly debate. Traditional attributions to apostles and their associates developed during the second century CE; the Gospels themselves are anonymous.

Mark, the shortest Gospel, is widely considered the earliest, composed circa 65 to 70 CE, possibly in Rome. Early church tradition attributes it to John Mark, companion of Peter and Barnabas, mentioned in Acts. Papias (early second century) claimed Mark recorded Peter's preaching, though not in chronological order. This tradition may preserve a genuine memory of Petrine influence, though the Gospel's author remains unknown.

The Gospel addresses a community facing persecution, possibly during Nero's reign. It portrays Jesus as the suffering Son of Man whose messianic identity is revealed through the cross. The narrative is fast-paced, emphasising Jesus's actions over teachings, culminating in the passion narrative. The original ending (Mark 16:8) concludes abruptly with the women fleeing the empty tomb in fear; later scribes added alternative endings to provide resurrection appearances.

Matthew, composed circa 80 to 90 CE, expands Mark's narrative with extensive teaching material, birth narrative and resurrection appearances. Early tradition attributes it to Matthew the tax collector, one of the twelve apostles. Yet the Gospel's dependence on Mark (an apostle would presumably rely on his own memories) and sophisticated Greek composition suggest a later, anonymous author writing for a predominantly Jewish-Christian community.

The Gospel presents Jesus as the new Moses, teacher of righteousness who fulfils Old Testament prophecy. The five major discourses (Sermon on the Mount, missionary instructions, parables, community regulations, eschatological teaching) parallel the Pentateuch. Matthew emphasises Jesus's Jewish identity whilst condemning Pharisaic hypocrisy, reflecting tensions between church and synagogue in the late first century.

Luke, composed circa 80 to 90 CE, forms the first volume of a two-part work (Luke-Acts) addressed to Theophilus. Early tradition attributes both volumes to Luke, a physician and companion of Paul mentioned in the epistles. This attribution is more plausible than Matthew's, as the author demonstrates knowledge of the Pauline mission and theology, though a definitive identification remains impossible.

Luke writes as a historian, claiming to have investigated everything carefully and to present an orderly account. He expands Mark's narrative with distinctive parables (Good Samaritan, Prodigal Son), emphasises Jesus's concern for the marginalised (women, poor, Samaritans, Gentiles) and presents salvation history from Jesus's birth through the church's expansion. The Gospel's literary quality is exceptional, demonstrating education in Hellenistic rhetoric and historiography.

The Synoptic Problem, the question of the Gospels' literary relationship, has generated extensive scholarly debate. The dominant theory proposes Markan priority: Matthew and Luke

independently used Mark, a sayings source (Q), and their own unique material. Alternative theories suggest different relationships, but Mark's priority commands widespread consensus.

The Gospel of John

The Fourth Gospel differs dramatically from the Synoptics in chronology, content and theology. Composed circa 90 to 110 CE, it presents Jesus as pre-existent Word made flesh, emphasising his divine identity through extended discourses and symbolic signs. The Gospel's relationship to the Synoptics is debated; the author may have known Mark but chose to write independently, addressing different concerns.

Early tradition attributes the Gospel to John, the son of Zebedee, one of Jesus's closest disciples. The Gospel refers to an anonymous "beloved disciple" who witnessed crucial events and whose testimony undergirds the narrative. Some identify this figure with John the apostle; others suggest a distinct individual, possibly a disciple in Jerusalem. The Gospel's final chapter (21:24) claims the beloved disciple authored the work, though this may reflect the community's attribution rather than literal authorship.

The Gospel's composition was complex. Stylistic inconsistencies, apparent dislocations (chapters 5 and 6 seem reversed) and the appendix (chapter 21) suggest multiple editorial stages. A Johannine community, possibly centred in Ephesus, preserved the beloved disciple's testimony, developing it through preaching and teaching before final written composition. The author (or final editor) was a sophisticated theologian, familiar with Jewish tradition, Hellenistic philosophy and early Christian confession.

The Gospel addresses a community in conflict with the synagogue, reflected in references to expulsion (9:22, 12:42, 16:2). It also combats docetic tendencies (denying Jesus's full humanity) and claims by John the Baptist's followers. The high Christology, presenting Jesus as divine Word, equal with the Father, represents developed theological reflection, though rooted in early Christian worship and confession.

Whether John the apostle contributed to the Gospel's tradition remains uncertain. The beloved disciple may preserve eyewitness testimony, though filtered through decades of community reflection and theological development. The Gospel's power lies not in resolving authorship questions but in its profound presentation of Jesus as the revealer of the Father, the source of eternal life, and the object of faith.

Acts of the Apostles

Acts, the second volume of Luke's work, narrates the church's expansion from Jerusalem to Rome, focusing on Peter's ministry to Jews and Paul's mission to Gentiles. The author demonstrates the same literary skill and theological perspective as the Gospel, confirming common authorship.

The traditional attribution to Luke, Paul's companion, gains support from the "we" passages (16:10 to 17, 20:5 to 15, 21:1 to 18, 27:1 to 28:16), where the narrator shifts to first-person plural, suggesting eyewitness participation. Yet these passages may derive from a travel diary (Luke's or another's) incorporated into the narrative, or represent a literary convention. The

author's knowledge of Paul differs from the epistles in significant ways, suggesting either a different perspective or a later composition based on tradition rather than personal knowledge.

Acts was composed circa 80-90 CE, possibly later. The author used sources: Jerusalem church traditions, Antiochene material, Pauline mission accounts and personal observation (if the "we" passages reflect genuine participation). He shaped these into a coherent narrative demonstrating the gospel's progress "to the ends of the earth" (1:8), fulfilling Jesus's commission.

The theological agenda is clear: the church's expansion represents the divine plan, guided by the Holy Spirit, and fulfils Old Testament prophecy. Jewish rejection of the gospel leads to the Gentile mission. The apostles, particularly Peter and Paul, act as faithful witnesses despite persecution. The narrative concludes with Paul preaching in Rome, symbolising the gospel's arrival at the empire's heart.

Historical questions surround Acts. The author's chronology, particularly of Paul's life, conflicts with the epistles. Speeches attributed to Peter, Stephen and Paul reflect Lukan style and theology rather than verbatim reporting, following ancient historiographical convention. Yet Acts preserves valuable historical information, including early Christian preaching, community practices and the Jerusalem council's deliberations.

Whether Luke the physician authored Acts remains uncertain but plausible. The work demonstrates historical interest, literary skill and theological sophistication, presenting the early church's story as a continuation of Jesus's mission, empowered by the Spirit and destined for universal proclamation.

Paul the Apostle

Paul dominates the New Testament, authoring thirteen epistles (by traditional count) and featuring prominently in Acts. His letters represent the earliest Christian writings, composed 50 to 64 CE, providing invaluable insight into early theology, community life and apostolic ministry.

Paul's biography can be reconstructed from his letters and Acts, though the sources sometimes conflict. Born in Tarsus, a Hellenistic city in Cilicia, he was a Pharisee and was educated in Jerusalem, possibly under Gamaliel. He persecuted the early church until a dramatic conversion experience on the Damascus road, where the risen Christ appeared to him. This encounter transformed him from persecutor to apostle, commissioned to proclaim the gospel to Gentiles.

Paul's missionary career spanned three decades, establishing churches throughout Asia Minor, Greece and possibly Spain. He endured persecution, imprisonment, shipwreck and constant opposition from both Jewish authorities and rival Christian teachers. His letters address specific situations in his churches: theological disputes, moral failures, persecution, false teaching and practical questions about worship and community life.

Seven letters are universally accepted as authentically Pauline: Romans, 1 and 2 Corinthians, Galatians, Philippians, 1 Thessalonians and Philemon. These demonstrate Paul's theological genius, combining Jewish scriptural interpretation, Hellenistic rhetoric and profound insight into Christ's significance. His central themes include justification by faith, participation in Christ's

death and resurrection, the Spirit's transforming power, the church as Christ's body and the imminent return of the Lord.

Three letters (Ephesians, Colossians, 2 Thessalonians) are disputed, with scholars divided over authenticity. They share Pauline themes and vocabulary but show stylistic differences and theological development that may reflect either Paul's later thought or pseudonymous composition by disciples.

The Pastoral Epistles (1 and 2 Timothy, Titus) are widely considered pseudonymous, composed in Paul's name by a later disciple addressing second-generation church concerns: leadership qualifications, false teaching and institutional development. They preserve Pauline tradition whilst adapting it to changing circumstances.

Paul's influence on Christian theology is immeasurable. His letters established foundational doctrines: grace, faith, justification, sanctification, ecclesiology and eschatology. His missionary strategy, establishing self-governing churches led by local leaders, shaped Christianity's expansion. His insistence on Gentile inclusion without requiring observance of Jewish law determined the church's universal character.

Paul died in Rome, probably during Nero's persecution (circa 64 CE), though details remain uncertain. His legacy endures through his letters, which continue to inspire, challenge and provoke theological reflection.

The General Epistles

The remaining New Testament letters, traditionally called General or Catholic Epistles, address broader audiences than Paul's church-specific correspondence. Their authorship, dating and purposes vary considerably.

Hebrews, an anonymous sermon or treatise, was traditionally attributed to Paul but differs dramatically in style, vocabulary and theology. The author was a sophisticated theologian, educated in Hellenistic Judaism, who presented Jesus as superior to angels, Moses and the Levitical priesthood. He addressed Jewish Christians tempted to abandon faith, possibly during persecution, urging perseverance through Christ's perfect sacrifice.

Proposed authors include Apollos, Barnabas, Priscilla and others, but certainty is impossible. The work was composed before 96 CE (when Clement of Rome quoted it), possibly 60 to 90 CE. The audience faced persecution and needed encouragement to maintain faith despite suffering.

James, attributed to James, the brother of Jesus and leader of the Jerusalem church, emphasises practical righteousness, care for the poor and faith demonstrated through works. The letter's excellent Greek and lack of reference to James's relationship with Jesus raise questions about authorship. It may derive from James himself (died circa 62 CE), from a disciple preserving his teaching, or from a later author writing in his name. The theology reflects Jewish Christianity, with minimal Christology and strong ethical emphasis.

First Peter, attributed to the apostle Peter, addresses Christians in Asia Minor facing persecution. The letter encourages faithful endurance, holy living and hope in Christ's return.

The sophisticated Greek and the use of the Septuagint suggest either that Peter used a skilled secretary (Silvanus is mentioned) or that the letter is pseudonymous, composed by a disciple after Peter's death (circa 64 CE). Dating ranges from 60 to 95 CE.

Second Peter, also attributed to Peter, differs dramatically from 1 Peter in style, vocabulary and concerns. It combats false teachers and defends the delay of Christ's return. The letter's dependence on Jude, its reference to Paul's letters as scripture, and its developed theology point to a late composition, possibly in the 100 to 125 CE range, making it the latest New Testament writing. It is widely considered pseudonymous, written in Peter's name to address second-generation concerns.

First, Second and Third John share vocabulary and themes with the Fourth Gospel but differ in style and purpose. They address a community divided by schism, with some members denying Jesus's full humanity (docetism) and claiming superior spiritual knowledge. The author, identifying himself as "the elder," emphasises love, truth and correct Christology.

Traditional attribution to John the apostle is possible but uncertain. The author may be the beloved disciple, a distinct John the Elder (mentioned by Papias) or an anonymous leader of the Johannine community. The letters were composed circa 90 to 110 CE, addressing the same community as the Gospel but at a later stage, dealing with internal conflict and theological deviation.

Jude, attributed to Jude, the brother of Jesus and James, is a brief polemic against false teachers who have infiltrated the community. The letter quotes Jewish apocalyptic literature (1 Enoch, Assumption of Moses), suggesting a Jewish-Christian author comfortable with this tradition. Dating ranges from 70 to 90 CE. Authorship by Jesus's brother is possible but uncertain; the letter may be pseudonymous.

These diverse letters demonstrate early Christianity's theological and practical concerns: persecution, false teaching, community conflict, ethical living and eschatological hope. Their inclusion in the canon reflects the early church's recognition of their apostolic authority and continuing relevance.

Revelation and Apocalyptic Literature

The Book of Revelation concludes the New Testament with vivid apocalyptic visions of cosmic conflict, divine judgement and new creation. The author identifies himself as John, a prophet exiled to Patmos, who received revelations of "what must soon take place" (1:1).

Early tradition identified this John with the apostle, son of Zebedee, also crediting him with the Fourth Gospel and epistles. Yet significant differences in language, style and theology suggest distinct authors. Revelation's Greek is rough, filled with Semitisms, unlike the Gospel's polished prose. The theology emphasises imminent judgement and Christ's warrior return, contrasting with the Gospel's realised eschatology and emphasis on present eternal life.

Most scholars distinguish John of Patmos from John the apostle and the beloved disciple. He was a Jewish-Christian prophet, possibly from Palestine, who ministered in Asia Minor during the late first century. His visions drew upon Old Testament imagery (particularly Daniel, Ezekiel

and Zechariah), Jewish apocalyptic tradition and early Christian confession, creating a complex symbolic narrative that addresses persecution and encourages faithful resistance.

The book was composed circa 95 to 96 CE, during or shortly after Domitian's reign, when Christians faced pressure to participate in imperial cult worship. The seven churches of Asia Minor, addressed in chapters 2 and 3, struggled with persecution, false teaching and accommodation to pagan society. John's visions assured them that Rome's apparent power was illusory; God remained sovereign, Christ would return victorious and faithful martyrs would be vindicated.

Revelation's symbolism is dense and multivalent. The beast represents Rome and its emperors, but also embodies all oppressive political power. Babylon symbolises Rome but evokes all corrupt civilisations. The numbers (seven, twelve, 144,000, 666) carry symbolic rather than literal meaning. The visions progress through cycles of judgement (seals, trumpets, bowls), building intensity toward the final confrontation and new creation.

Interpretation of Revelation has generated enormous controversy. Preterist readings see it addressing first-century circumstances exclusively. Historicist approaches seek to predict church history through the ages. Futurist interpretations view most visions as yet unfulfilled. Idealist readings emphasise timeless spiritual truths. Each approach captures partial truth; the book addresses its original context whilst speaking to subsequent generations facing persecution and injustice.

John of Patmos remains a mysterious figure. His prophetic authority derived from visionary experience rather than apostolic office. His literary achievement, combining Jewish apocalyptic tradition with Christian confession, created a work of enduring power, offering hope to the persecuted and proclaiming God's ultimate victory over evil.

Conclusion: The Formation of the Biblical Canon

The question of biblical authorship cannot be separated from the formation of the canon, the process by which certain books were recognised as scripture, whilst others were excluded. This process spanned centuries, involving complex historical, theological and political factors.

The Hebrew Bible's canon developed in stages. The Torah achieved authoritative status during the Persian period (fifth to fourth centuries BCE), when the post-exilic community reconstituted itself around written law. The Prophets were recognised by the second century BCE, though debate continued about specific books. The Writings, the most diverse collection, were not finally settled until the late first century CE, with disputes about Esther, Ecclesiastes, Song of Solomon and other books continuing in rabbinic discussion.

The New Testament canon developed even more gradually. Paul's letters circulated among churches and were collected by the late first century. The four Gospels achieved widespread recognition by the mid-second century, though other gospels (Thomas, Peter, Mary) competed for acceptance. Acts, being linked to Luke, gained authority alongside the Gospel. The General Epistles and Revelation faced more resistance, with some churches accepting them whilst others rejected them well into the fourth century.

The criteria for canonicity included apostolic authorship or association, orthodox theology, widespread use in worship and the witness of the Spirit in the community's reception. Yet these criteria were applied inconsistently, and political factors influenced decisions. The councils of Hippo (393 CE) and Carthage (397 CE) ratified the twenty-seven-book New Testament canon, though Eastern churches continued to dispute certain books.

The relationship between authorship and authority is complex. Traditional attributions to Moses, David, Solomon, the apostles, and the prophets lent authority to the books, yet many canonical books are anonymous or pseudonymous. The early church recognised that apostolic tradition, not merely apostolic authorship, conveyed authority. A book written by Paul's disciple in his name could faithfully preserve and apply his teaching to new circumstances.

Modern biblical scholarship has complicated traditional authorship claims, demonstrating that most biblical books are composite works, edited and redacted across generations. This need not undermine faith; it reveals how communities preserved, interpreted and applied sacred tradition to changing circumstances. The Bible is not merely ancient literature but a living tradition, shaped by believing communities who found in these texts the word of God.

The authors of scripture, whether known or anonymous, individual or collective, were human beings embedded in specific historical and cultural contexts. They wrote in ancient languages, using literary conventions of their times, addressing particular audiences and situations. Yet through their words, communities of faith have encountered divine revelation, finding guidance, comfort, challenge and hope.

Understanding biblical authorship requires holding together historical investigation and theological confession. We honour the human authors by studying their contexts, languages and purposes. We honour the divine inspiration by recognising that these texts continue to speak beyond their original circumstances, mediating God's presence and purpose to subsequent generations.

The Bible's authority derives not from inerrant authorship but from its capacity to form communities of faith, to reveal God's character and purposes, to challenge injustice and to inspire hope. Whether Moses wrote the Pentateuch, whether David composed the Psalms, whether John the apostle authored the Fourth Gospel matters less than the reality that, through these texts, people have encountered the living God across millennia.

The authors of scripture, known and unknown, have given us an extraordinary gift: a library of texts that continues to shape human civilisation, inspire artistic creation, ground ethical reflection and mediate divine presence. Their words, preserved and transmitted by faithful communities, remain living and active, speaking to each generation's circumstances whilst maintaining continuity with ancient revelation.

As we conclude this biographical study, we recognise both the limits of our knowledge and the richness of the tradition. Many authors remain anonymous, their identities lost to history. Others are known only through tradition, their historical existence uncertain. Yet through their collective witness, diverse and sometimes contradictory, we encounter the story of God's engagement with humanity: creation and fall, covenant and law, exile and restoration, incarnation and resurrection, church and kingdom.

The Bible is not a single book but a library, not a monologue but a conversation spanning centuries, not a systematic theology but a collection of testimonies, arguments, prayers, songs, stories and visions. Its authors were prophets and priests, kings and peasants, apostles and anonymous scribes. Together, they created scripture, the foundational text of the Jewish and Christian faiths, a work that continues to inspire, challenge, and transform those who engage with it seriously.