

Why Did They Write?

Some of the books of the Bible give no indication of the intention of the human writer or writers. However, there are many instances in which the writer's purpose (or intent) is shown. Let's examine some examples.

Luke, the only non-Jewish author of a New Testament book, accompanied the apostle Paul on some of his missionary journeys. He was the author of the Gospel of Luke and the book of Acts. Luke was by profession a physician and writer of more than one quarter of the New Testament. The Gospel of Luke begins with these words:

Many have undertaken to draw up an account of the things that have been fulfilled among us, just as they were handed down to us by those who from the first were eyewitnesses and servants of the word. Therefore, since I myself have carefully investigated everything from the beginning, it seemed good also to me to write an orderly account for you, most excellent Theophilus, so that you may know the certainty of the things you have been taught.¹

Luke's intent in writing was so that the reader "might know the certainty of the things you have been taught." Taught about what? The answer can be found in the opening remarks of the book of Acts, Luke's follow up to his gospel:

In my former book, Theophilus, I wrote about all that Jesus began to do and to teach until the day he was taken up to heaven, after giving instructions through the Holy Spirit to the apostles he had chosen.²

Luke was referring to the teachings of Jesus Christ given through the Holy Spirit to the apostles. Luke's intent is to make sure the reader understands that this teaching is the truth. The New Testament includes two letters written by the apostle Peter. In the first letter he wrote:

Be self-controlled and alert. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour. Resist him, standing firm in the faith, because you know that your brothers throughout the world are undergoing the same kind of sufferings. And the God of all grace, who called you to his eternal glory in Christ, after you have suffered a little while, will himself restore you and make you strong, firm and steadfast. To him be the power for ever and ever. Amen.
With the help of Silas, whom I regard as a faithful brother, I have written to you briefly, encouraging you and testifying that this is the true grace of God. Stand fast in it.³

The apostle Peter's stated purpose in writing was to encourage believers undergoing difficulties to "stand fast" and testify that the teaching they received "is the true grace of God". In the second letter the apostle Peter wrote:

Dear friends, this is now my second letter to you. I have written both of them as reminders to stimulate you to wholesome thinking. I want you to recall the words spoken in the past by the holy prophets and the command given by our Lord and Savior through your apostles.⁴

The apostle Peter's method of stimulating believers to wholesome thinking is to remind them of words spoken in the past by the holy prophets (written in the Old Testament) and the command given by Jesus Christ through the apostles he had chosen (this information is contained in the New Testament). Why did he write? The reason for writing is very clearly stated. Peter's method for accomplishing that purpose is also clearly laid out.

¹ Luke 1:1-4

² Acts 1:1-2

³ 1 Peter 5:8-12

⁴ 2 Peter 3:1-2

Three letters from the apostle John are included in the New Testament. The reasoning John lays out clearly answers the question: Why did you write this? The reason for writing is integral with the message concerning Jesus Christ. The following is a long passage that demonstrates this:

That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked at and our hands have touched — this we proclaim concerning the Word of life. The life appeared; we have seen it and testify to it, and we proclaim to you the eternal life, which was with the Father and has appeared to us. We proclaim to you what we have seen and heard, so that you also may have fellowship with us. And our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son, Jesus Christ. We write this to make our joy complete.

This is the message we have heard from him and declare to you: God is light; in him there is no darkness at all. If we claim to have fellowship with him yet walk in the darkness, we lie and do not live by the truth. But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus, his Son, purifies us from all sin.

If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness. If we claim we have not sinned, we make him out to be a liar and his word has no place in our lives.

My dear children, I write this to you so that you will not sin. But if anybody does sin, we have one who speaks to the Father in our defense — Jesus Christ, the Righteous One. He is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not only for ours but also for the sins of the whole world.

We know that we have come to know him if we obey his commands. The man who says, "I know him," but does not do what he commands is a liar, and the truth is not in him. But if anyone obeys his word, God's love is truly made complete in him. This is how we know we are in him: Whoever claims to live in him must walk as Jesus did.

Dear friends, I am not writing you a new command but an old one, which you have had since the beginning. This old command is the message you have heard. Yet I am writing you a new command; its truth is seen in him and you, because the darkness is passing and the true light is already shining.

Anyone who claims to be in the light but hates his brother is still in the darkness. Whoever loves his brother lives in the light, and there is nothing in him to make him stumble. But whoever hates his brother is in the darkness and walks around in the darkness; he does not know where he is going, because the darkness has blinded him.

I write to you, dear children,
because your sins have been forgiven on account of his name.

I write to you, fathers,
because you have known him who is from the beginning.

I write to you, young men,
because you have overcome the evil one.

I write to you, dear children,
because you have known the Father.

I write to you, fathers,
because you have known him who is from the beginning.

I write to you, young men,
because you are strong, and the word of God lives in you, and you have overcome the evil one.⁵

⁵ 1 John 1:1 - 2:14

Some of the wording may seem a little awkward, but the meaning is clear. Let's step through this passage. First the apostle strikes the often struck "eyewitness" note: he is testifying to the truth he has seen heard and touched, about Jesus Christ. This has brought him joy and he is passing this on, in writing, to make their joy complete. In other words he is writing to share a joyful and important thing he personally experienced. John is writing a letter of encouragement to believers in Jesus Christ. The apostle continues by making the point that one's actions indicate one's connection with the truth. He sums up the point with this:

If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness. If we claim we have not sinned, we make him out to be a liar and his word has no place in our lives.⁶

Then John indicates that this dynamic for forgiveness is the reason for his writing: "My dear children, I write this to you so that you will not sin." The passage continues with this theme of connecting of action with truth. John brings in the model of obedience to Christ's commands and once again makes the connection to why he is writing:

Dear friends, I am not writing you a new command but an old one, which you have had since the beginning. This old command is the message you have heard. Yet I am writing you a new command; its truth is seen in him and you, because the darkness is passing and the true light is already shining.⁷

Next the apostle John continues with the "action to truth connection" or in other words the concept of personal actions indicating the truth within us. This is illustrated by talking about loving your brother and referring to following Christ's teaching as walking in the light. Finally, the passage closes with this poem on the theme of "I write to you, ..., because", linking the reason for his writing with their connection to Jesus Christ. Let's sum up what we have been discussing about this passage from 1 John. Why did John write? John wrote to believers to make their joy complete, so they will not sin and to underscore their relationship to the truth by obedience to the teaching of Jesus Christ.

While exiled on the island of Patmos the apostle John received a vision that included instructions to write down what he saw. Revelation, the last book in the Bible, includes these visions. Notice what he says here, that the one who reads and takes to heart the words of this prophecy will be blessed.

The revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave him to show his servants what must soon take place. He made it known by sending his angel to his servant John, who testifies to everything he saw — that is, the word of God and the testimony of Jesus Christ. Blessed is the one who reads the words of this prophecy, and blessed are those who hear it and take to heart what is written in it, because the time is near.⁸

John wrote to bless the reader and believer. He also wrote because the vision of Jesus Christ instructed him to do so:

I, John, your brother and companion in the suffering and kingdom and patient endurance that are ours in Jesus, was on the island of Patmos because of the word of God and the testimony of Jesus. On the Lord's Day I was in the Spirit, and I heard behind me a loud voice like a trumpet, which said: "Write on a scroll what you see and send it to the seven churches: to Ephesus, Smyrna, Pergamum, Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia and Laodicea."

I turned around to see the voice that was speaking to me. And when I turned I saw seven golden lampstands, and among the lampstands was someone "like a son of man," dressed in a robe reaching down to his feet and with a golden sash around his chest. His head and hair were white like wool, as white as snow, and his eyes were like

⁶ 1 John 1:8-10

⁷ 1 John 2:7-8

⁸ Rev 1:1-3

blazing fire. His feet were like bronze glowing in a furnace, and his voice was like the sound of rushing waters. In his right hand he held seven stars, and out of his mouth came a sharp double-edged sword. His face was like the sun shining in all its brilliance. When I saw him, I fell at his feet as though dead. Then he placed his right hand on me and said: "Do not be afraid. I am the First and the Last. I am the Living One; I was dead, and behold I am alive for ever and ever! And I hold the keys of death and Hades. "Write, therefore, what you have seen, what is now and what will take place later."⁹

These passages clearly answer the question: Why did the apostle John write? Let's now turn to the apostle Paul. In his letter to the believers in Ephesus Paul wrote:

Surely you have heard about the administration of God's grace that was given to me for you, that is, the mystery made known to me by revelation, as I have already written briefly. In reading this, then, you will be able to understand my insight into the mystery of Christ, which was not made known to men in other generations as it has now been revealed by the Spirit to God's holy apostles and prophets. This mystery is that through the gospel the Gentiles are heirs together with Israel, members together of one body, and sharers together in the promise in Christ Jesus.¹⁰

It is certainly clear from this passage that the apostle Paul wrote what God revealed to him and that the purpose of his writing is so that "you will be able to understand my insight into the mystery of Christ". The apostle also wrote to believers in various places to help them to remain obedient to the instruction he gave when he was with them:

This is why I write these things when I am absent, that when I come I may not have to be harsh in my use of authority — the authority the Lord gave me for building you up, not for tearing you down.¹¹

In the following passage the apostle Paul is making a point about support for those who do the work of preaching the gospel. He refers to a passage in the Old Testament (Deut. 25:4) and makes the point that it was written for our benefit:

Who serves as a soldier at his own expense? Who plants a vineyard and does not eat of its grapes? Who tends a flock and does not drink of the milk? Do I say this merely from a human point of view? Doesn't the Law say the same thing? For it is written in the Law of Moses: "Do not muzzle an ox while it is treading out the grain." Is it about oxen that God is concerned? Surely he says this for us, doesn't he? Yes, this was written for us, because when the plowman plows and the thresher threshes, they ought to do so in the hope of sharing in the harvest. If we have sown spiritual seed among you, is it too much if we reap a material harvest from you? If others have this right of support from you, shouldn't we have it all the more?

But we did not use this right. On the contrary, we put up with anything rather than hinder the gospel of Christ.¹²

Later in the same letter, Paul elaborates further on the purpose of the Old Testament writings. Talking about the experiences of Israel in the desert he says: "These things happened to them as examples and were written down as warnings for us, on whom the fulfillment of the ages has come." Building the case that those things were written for our instruction:

Now these things occurred as examples to keep us from setting our hearts on evil things as they did. Do not be idolaters, as some of them were; as it is written: "The people sat down to eat and drink and got up to indulge in pagan revelry." We should not commit sexual immorality, as some of them did — and in one day twenty-three thousand of them died. We should not test the Lord, as some of them did — and were

⁹ Rev 1:9-19

¹⁰ Eph 3:2-6

¹¹ 2 Cor 13:10

¹² 1 Cor 9:7-12

killed by snakes. And do not grumble, as some of them did — and were killed by the destroying angel.

These things happened to them as examples and were written down as warnings for us, on whom the fulfillment of the ages has come.¹³

Although some of the books of the Bible give no indication of the intention of the human writer or writers (and this is especially true of the Old Testament) God, by the Holy Spirit, clearly indicates his singular purpose. The apostle Paul wrote in his letter to the Romans:

For everything that was written in the past was written to teach us, so that through endurance and the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope.¹⁴

Notice “everything that was written in the past was written to teach us”. The apostle is most assuredly including what we call the Old Testament in this statement. Why did they write? To teach us, is one answer. The following two passages from the apostles Paul and Peter amplify this point:

All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.¹⁵

And we have the word of the prophets made more certain, and you will do well to pay attention to it, as to a light shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts. Above all, you must understand that no prophecy of Scripture came about by the prophet's own interpretation. For prophecy never had its origin in the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit.¹⁶

I often use these passages when discussing the authority of the scriptures and the Holy Spirit. Clearly all these points are interrelated. More important than why each of the human authors wrote is the purpose of God for causing, through the Holy Spirit, these things to be written. That being said, let's continue. We have examined the writings of various New Testament writers and looked at what each of them wrote concerning the question: “Why did they write?” This is a good point to look at the Old Testament as well.

On Mount Sinai during the nation of Israel's desert wanderings God gave Moses this instruction:

Then the LORD said to Moses, "Write down these words, for in accordance with these words I have made a covenant with you and with Israel."¹⁷

God instructed Moses to write because the body of instructions the Lord was giving to Moses was vitally important and necessary for the people to take to heart:

Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one. Love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength. These commandments that I give you today are to be upon your hearts. Impress them on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up. Tie them as symbols on your hands and bind them on your foreheads. Write them on the doorframes of your houses and on your gates.

When the LORD your God brings you into the land he swore to your fathers, to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, to give you — a land with large, flourishing cities you did not build, houses filled with all kinds of good things you did not provide, wells you did not dig, and vineyards and olive groves you did not plant — then when you eat and are satisfied, be careful that you do not forget the LORD, who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery.

Fear the LORD your God, serve him only and take your oaths in his name. Do not follow other gods, the gods of the peoples around you; for the LORD your God, who is among

¹³ 1 Cor 10:6-11

¹⁴ Rom 15:4

¹⁵ 2 Tim 3:16-17

¹⁶ 2 Peter 1:19-21

¹⁷ Ex 34:27

you, is a jealous God and his anger will burn against you, and he will destroy you from the face of the land. Do not test the LORD your God as you did at Massah. Be sure to keep the commands of the LORD your God and the stipulations and decrees he has given you. Do what is right and good in the LORD's sight, so that it may go well with you and you may go in and take over the good land that the LORD promised on oath to your forefathers, thrusting out all your enemies before you, as the LORD said.

In the future, when your son asks you, "What is the meaning of the stipulations, decrees and laws the LORD our God has commanded you?" tell him: "We were slaves of Pharaoh in Egypt, but the LORD brought us out of Egypt with a mighty hand. Before our eyes the LORD sent miraculous signs and wonders — great and terrible — upon Egypt and Pharaoh and his whole household. But he brought us out from there to bring us in and give us the land that he promised on oath to our forefathers. The LORD commanded us to obey all these decrees and to fear the LORD our God, so that we might always prosper and be kept alive, as is the case today. And if we are careful to obey all this law before the LORD our God, as he has commanded us, that will be our righteousness."¹⁸

Notice first "the LORD is one", a singular God with a singular purpose, this is in accordance with the promise God made to Abraham hundreds of years earlier. We also see the instruction to Israel to give these commandments a prominent place in their daily life and to pass them on from generation to generation. The instruction "be careful that you do not forget the LORD" came with a promise "so that it may go well with you". There was also a consequence if the people were not careful to obey:

All the nations will ask: "Why has the LORD done this to this land? Why this fierce, burning anger?"

And the answer will be: "It is because this people abandoned the covenant of the LORD, the God of their fathers, the covenant he made with them when he brought them out of Egypt."¹⁹

This is why God instructed Moses to write. Later generations could read these words and understand that they could only be from God (more on this important point later). The written word makes it very clear the choice God made and the choice he presented to the nation of Israel:

See, I set before you today life and prosperity, death and destruction. For I command you today to love the LORD your God, to walk in his ways, and to keep his commands, decrees and laws; then you will live and increase, and the LORD your God will bless you in the land you are entering to possess.

But if your heart turns away and you are not obedient, and if you are drawn away to bow down to other gods and worship them, I declare to you this day that you will certainly be destroyed.

You will not live long in the land you are crossing the Jordan to enter and possess.

This day I call heaven and earth as witnesses against you that I have set before you life and death, blessings and curses. Now choose life, so that you and your children may live and that you may love the LORD your God, listen to his voice, and hold fast to him. For the LORD is your life, and he will give you many years in the land he swore to give to your fathers, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.²⁰

Moses knew he would not be entering the promised land with them and he understood the importance of the words God had entrusted him to relay. This is also why he wrote.

Then Moses went out and spoke these words to all Israel: "I am now a hundred and twenty years old and I am no longer able to lead you. The LORD has said to me, 'You shall not cross the Jordan.'

¹⁸ Deut 6:4-25

¹⁹ Deut 29:24-25

²⁰ Deut 30:15-20

So Moses wrote down this law and gave it to the priests, the sons of Levi, who carried the ark of the covenant of the LORD, and to all the elders of Israel.²¹

Let's now turn to the prophets and look for answers to the question: Why did they write? This is from the book of the prophet Jeremiah:

This is the word that came to Jeremiah from the LORD: "This is what the LORD, the God of Israel, says: 'Write in a book all the words I have spoken to you. In the fourth year of Jehoiakim son of Josiah king of Judah, this word came to Jeremiah from the LORD: 'Take a scroll and write on it all the words I have spoken to you concerning Israel, Judah and all the other nations from the time I began speaking to you in the reign of Josiah till now. Perhaps when the people of Judah hear about every disaster I plan to inflict on them, each of them will turn from his wicked way; then I will forgive their wickedness and their sin.'"²²

God instructed Jeremiah to write and inform the people the need to reform their ways or face the consequences. Through Jeremiah God continues to remind the people what they need to do:

This is the word that came to Jeremiah from the LORD: "Stand at the gate of the LORD's house and there proclaim this message:

"Hear the word of the LORD, all you people of Judah who come through these gates to worship the LORD. This is what the LORD Almighty, the God of Israel, says: Reform your ways and your actions, and I will let you live in this place. Do not trust in deceptive words and say, 'This is the temple of the LORD, the temple of the LORD, the temple of the LORD!' If you really change your ways and your actions and deal with each other justly, if you do not oppress the alien, the fatherless or the widow and do not shed innocent blood in this place, and if you do not follow other gods to your own harm, then I will let you live in this place, in the land I gave your forefathers for ever and ever. But look, you are trusting in deceptive words that are worthless."²³

Jeremiah and the rest of the prophets wrote because the word of the Lord came to them and there were consequences for the hearers because the people were following deceptive words, much like it is today. Writing many hundreds of years after the time of Moses, the prophet Jeremiah, in the final years of the decline of the nation of Israel, saw the consequences predicted by Moses in Deuteronomy 29:24-25:

All the nations will ask: "Why has the LORD done this to this land? Why this fierce, burning anger?"

And the answer will be: "It is because this people abandoned the covenant of the LORD, the God of their fathers, the covenant he made with them when he brought them out of Egypt."²⁴

Clearly, these writers of scripture wrote because God revealed to them vitally important information that was meant to be passed on to the people. We have the instances where the writer records God's specific instruction to write. We also notice the many, many instances where the writer indicates that this information is from God. For example: the phrase "the Lord says" occurs 33 times in the book of Isaiah and 83 times in Jeremiah. The phrase "the word of the lord came to me" occurs 49 times in Ezekiel and the phrase "the sovereign Lord says" occurs 122 times in Ezekiel. A discussion of the intent of the various human writers of scripture would be incomplete without discussing that their main motivation for writing came from God. Their intent was to pass on a specific message from God in obedience to God's specific instruction. There are many instances in

²¹ Deut 31:1-2, 9

²² Jer 30:1-2, 36:1-3

²³ Jer 7:1-8

²⁴ Deut 29:24-25

the various books of the prophets where a specific day and date is indicated when God spoke to them. For example from the book of the prophet Ezekiel:

In the thirtieth year, in the fourth month on the fifth day, while I was among the exiles by the Kebar River, the heavens were opened and I saw visions of God. On the fifth of the month — it was the fifth year of the exile of King Jehoiachin—the word of the LORD came to Ezekiel the priest, the son of Buzi, by the Kebar River in the land of the Babylonians. There the hand of the LORD was upon him.²⁵

There are many other examples of this in the writings of Ezekiel and the various other prophets. These writers were relating something that actually happened at a specific date and time. These messages were vitally important. This clearly shows why they wrote.

Returning once again to the passage in Deuteronomy written by Moses about 1400 BC, this passage is referring to events that would happen many, many hundreds of years later:

All the nations will ask: "Why has the LORD done this to this land? Why this fierce, burning anger?"

And the answer will be: "It is because this people abandoned the covenant of the LORD, the God of their fathers, the covenant he made with them when he brought them out of Egypt."²⁶

Notice how God repeats this prophecy to Solomon at the time of the dedication of the temple. This is about 960 BC, roughly 400 years after Moses. This is recorded in 1 Kings and 2 Chronicles:

"But if you or your sons turn away from me and do not observe the commands and decrees I have given you and go off to serve other gods and worship them, then I will cut off Israel from the land I have given them and will reject this temple I have consecrated for my Name. Israel will then become a byword and an object of ridicule among all peoples. And though this temple is now imposing, all who pass by will be appalled and will scoff and say, 'Why has the LORD done such a thing to this land and to this temple?' People will answer, 'Because they have forsaken the LORD their God, who brought their fathers out of Egypt, and have embraced other gods, worshipping and serving them — that is why the LORD brought all this disaster on them.'"²⁷

The prophet Ezekiel wrote during the time that the events foretold in these prophecies had come to pass. Ezekiel wrote from about 593 to 573 BC a little less than 400 years after Solomon and 800 years after Moses. Ezekiel warned the people what was about to happen. It is interesting to note that the reaction to the message from God is similar to the reaction of some today to the scriptures:

Then I said, "Ah, Sovereign LORD! They are saying of me, 'Isn't he just telling parables?'"²⁸

Even while these events were unfolding, and God through Ezekiel continued to warn them, many still refused to listen:

In the ninth year, in the tenth month on the tenth day, the word of the LORD came to me: "Son of man, record this date, this very date, because the king of Babylon has laid siege to Jerusalem this very day.

"I the LORD have spoken. The time has come for me to act. I will not hold back; I will not have pity, nor will I relent. You will be judged according to your conduct and your actions, declares the Sovereign LORD."

Then the people asked me, "Won't you tell us what these things have to do with us?"

So I said to them, "The word of the LORD came to me: Say to the house of Israel, 'This is what the Sovereign LORD says: I am about to desecrate my sanctuary — the

²⁵ Ezek 1:1-3

²⁶ Deut 29:24-25

²⁷ 1 Kings 9:6-9

²⁸ Ezek 20:49

stronghold in which you take pride, the delight of your eyes, the object of your affection. The sons and daughters you left behind will fall by the sword.²⁹

Notice the reaction of the people "Won't you tell us what these things have to do with us?" They should have known what was about to happen since they had been warned many, many times and for many hundreds of years. During this siege of Jerusalem God makes an additional prophecy through Ezekiel:

"And you, son of man, on the day I take away their stronghold, their joy and glory, the delight of their eyes, their heart's desire, and their sons and daughters as well—on that day a fugitive will come to tell you the news. At that time your mouth will be opened; you will speak with him and will no longer be silent. So you will be a sign to them, and they will know that I am the LORD."³⁰

Notice God's purpose in the work of the prophet "So you will be a sign to them, and they will know that I am the LORD". Indeed, the events came to pass as God predicted through the prophet:

In the twelfth year of our exile, in the tenth month on the fifth day, a man who had escaped from Jerusalem came to me and said, "The city has fallen!" Now the evening before the man arrived, the hand of the LORD was upon me, and he opened my mouth before the man came to me in the morning. So my mouth was opened and I was no longer silent.

"Say this to them: 'This is what the Sovereign LORD says: As surely as I live, those who are left in the ruins will fall by the sword, those out in the country I will give to the wild animals to be devoured, and those in strongholds and caves will die of a plague. I will make the land a desolate waste, and her proud strength will come to an end, and the mountains of Israel will become desolate so that no one will cross them. Then they will know that I am the LORD, when I have made the land a desolate waste because of all the detestable things they have done.'

"As for you, son of man, your countrymen are talking together about you by the walls and at the doors of the houses, saying to each other, 'Come and hear the message that has come from the LORD.' My people come to you, as they usually do, and sit before you to listen to your words, but they do not put them into practice. With their mouths they express devotion, but their hearts are greedy for unjust gain. Indeed, to them you are nothing more than one who sings love songs with a beautiful voice and plays an instrument well, for they hear your words but do not put them into practice.

"When all this comes true — and it surely will — then they will know that a prophet has been among them."³¹

Why did they write? God told them to. Why did God tell them to write? The purpose of God repeating a message through various writings from different writers spanning hundreds of years is to prove that the message is from God. The following passage is from a prayer the prophet Daniel prayed to God in 538 BC less than 100 years later after the time of Ezekiel:

You have fulfilled the words spoken against us and against our rulers by bringing upon us great disaster. Under the whole heaven nothing has ever been done like what has been done to Jerusalem. Just as it is written in the Law of Moses, all this disaster has come upon us, yet we have not sought the favor of the LORD our God by turning from our sins and giving attention to your truth.³²

We know the year because Daniel tells us earlier in that same chapter. Daniel also tells us that he is responding to the word of God spoken by the prophet Jeremiah and written some 50+ years earlier (remember we looked at Jeremiah 30:1-2, 36:1-3 where God tells him to write). Daniel wrote:

²⁹ Ezek 24:1-2, 14, 19-21

³⁰ Ezek 24:25-27

³¹ Ezek 33:21-22, 27-33

³² Dan 9:12-13

In the first year of Darius son of Xerxes (a Mede by descent), who was made ruler over the Babylonian kingdom—in the first year of his reign, I, Daniel, understood from the Scriptures, according to the word of the LORD given to Jeremiah the prophet, that the desolation of Jerusalem would last seventy years. So I turned to the Lord God and pleaded with him in prayer and petition, in fasting, and in sackcloth and ashes.³³

Some feel the need to dispute the dates the various prophets indicate in their writings because they do not recognize the purpose of God in causing these things to be written. The premise for their reasoning is: How can these dates be correct when the prophet is clearly talking about things that had not yet happened? The reason why God revealed these things to them and the reason they wrote is so that it can be clearly seen that this was done through God.

To wrap this up, let's not forget the promise God made to Abraham in response to the events recorded in Genesis chapter 3 and the whole purpose of all this: Jesus Christ, through whom the whole world would be blessed. In the very chapter in Daniel we just looked at we also see prophecies about the Messiah. All the prophets and Moses spoke of the Messiah. This indeed was God's overall purpose in causing these things to be written. Early in his ministry Jesus Christ, returning to his childhood home, made this announcement recorded in the Gospel of Luke:

He went to Nazareth, where he had been brought up, and on the Sabbath day he went into the synagogue, as was his custom. And he stood up to read. The scroll of the prophet Isaiah was handed to him. Unrolling it, he found the place where it is written:

"The Spirit of the Lord is on me,
because he has anointed me
to preach good news to the poor.
He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners
and recovery of sight for the blind,
to release the oppressed,
to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor."

Then he rolled up the scroll, gave it back to the attendant and sat down. The eyes of everyone in the synagogue were fastened on him, and he began by saying to them, "Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing."³⁴

Speaking to some who refused to believe what he was saying, Jesus Christ said this:

You diligently study the Scriptures because you think that by them you possess eternal life. These are the Scriptures that testify about me, yet you refuse to come to me to have life.

"But do not think I will accuse you before the Father. Your accuser is Moses, on whom your hopes are set. If you believed Moses, you would believe me, for he wrote about me. But since you do not believe what he wrote, how are you going to believe what I say?"³⁵

Christ said of the writing of Isaiah: "Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing." Christ said of Moses: "he wrote about me." Why did they write? Although some of the books of the Bible give no indication of the intention of the human writer or writers, it is abundantly clear that the overall purpose of God was to tell us of Jesus Christ. The book of Acts contains many examples of the apostles and other disciples of Jesus Christ making this very point. To complete this wrap up, here are a few examples (some lengthy) from the pen of Luke contained in the book of Acts. In Acts chapter 2 the apostle Peter is speaking on the day of Pentecost and quoting from the prophet Joel and from David:

Then Peter stood up with the Eleven, raised his voice and addressed the crowd: "Fellow Jews and all of you who live in Jerusalem, let me explain this to you; listen carefully to

³³ Dan 9:1-3

³⁴ Luke 4:16-21

³⁵ John 5:39-40, 45-47

what I say. These men are not drunk, as you suppose. It's only nine in the morning! No, this is what was spoken by the prophet Joel:

"In the last days, God says, I will pour out my Spirit on all people. Your sons and daughters will prophesy, your young men will see visions, your old men will dream dreams. Even on my servants, both men and women, I will pour out my Spirit in those days, and they will prophesy. I will show wonders in the heaven above and signs on the earth below, blood and fire and billows of smoke. The sun will be turned to darkness and the moon to blood before the coming of the great and glorious day of the Lord. And everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.'

"Men of Israel, listen to this: Jesus of Nazareth was a man accredited by God to you by miracles, wonders and signs, which God did among you through him, as you yourselves know. This man was handed over to you by God's set purpose and foreknowledge; and you, with the help of wicked men, put him to death by nailing him to the cross. But God raised him from the dead, freeing him from the agony of death, because it was impossible for death to keep its hold on him. David said about him:

"I saw the Lord always before me. Because he is at my right hand, I will not be shaken. Therefore my heart is glad and my tongue rejoices; my body also will live in hope, because you will not abandon me to the grave, nor will you let your Holy One see decay. You have made known to me the paths of life; you will fill me with joy in your presence.'

"Brothers, I can tell you confidently that the patriarch David died and was buried, and his tomb is here to this day. But he was a prophet and knew that God had promised him on oath that he would place one of his descendants on his throne. Seeing what was ahead, he spoke of the resurrection of the Christ, that he was not abandoned to the grave, nor did his body see decay. God has raised this Jesus to life, and we are all witnesses of the fact. Exalted to the right hand of God, he has received from the Father the promised Holy Spirit and has poured out what you now see and hear. For David did not ascend to heaven, and yet he said,

"The Lord said to my Lord: "Sit at my right hand until I make your enemies a footstool for your feet."'

"Therefore let all Israel be assured of this: God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Christ."³⁶

The apostle Peter is also quoted in Acts chapter 3 saying this:

"Now, brothers, I know that you acted in ignorance, as did your leaders. But this is how God fulfilled what he had foretold through all the prophets, saying that his Christ would suffer. Repent, then, and turn to God, so that your sins may be wiped out, that times of refreshing may come from the Lord, and that he may send the Christ, who has been appointed for you — even Jesus.

"Indeed, all the prophets from Samuel on, as many as have spoken, have foretold these days. And you are heirs of the prophets and of the covenant God made with your fathers. He said to Abraham, 'Through your offspring all peoples on earth will be blessed.' When God raised up his servant, he sent him first to you to bless you by turning each of you from your wicked ways."³⁷

Notice what Peter says in his summary here "Indeed, all the prophets from Samuel on, as many as have spoken, have foretold these days." Why did they write? Peter says here all the prophets wrote to foretell of these days. Also notice the apostle traces this back to the promise God made to Abraham recorded way back in Genesis chapters 22 and 26.

³⁶ Acts 2:14-36

³⁷ Acts 3:17-20, 24-26

In Acts chapter 7 Stephen, a disciple of Jesus Christ, after being accused of many false charges made the following response quoting from Genesis, Exodus, Deuteronomy and various prophets:

Then the high priest asked him, "Are these charges true?"

To this he replied: "Brothers and fathers, listen to me! The God of glory appeared to our father Abraham while he was still in Mesopotamia, before he lived in Haran.

'Leave your country and your people,' God said, 'and go to the land I will show you.' "So he left the land of the Chaldeans and settled in Haran. After the death of his father, God sent him to this land where you are now living. He gave him no inheritance here, not even a foot of ground. But God promised him that he and his descendants after him would possess the land, even though at that time Abraham had no child. God spoke to him in this way:

'Your descendants will be strangers in a country not their own, and they will be enslaved and mistreated four hundred years. But I will punish the nation they serve as slaves,' God said, 'and afterward they will come out of that country and worship me in this place.'

Then he gave Abraham the covenant of circumcision. And Abraham became the father of Isaac and circumcised him eight days after his birth. Later Isaac became the father of Jacob, and Jacob became the father of the twelve patriarchs.

"Because the patriarchs were jealous of Joseph, they sold him as a slave into Egypt. But God was with him and rescued him from all his troubles. He gave Joseph wisdom and enabled him to gain the goodwill of Pharaoh king of Egypt; so he made him ruler over Egypt and all his palace.

"Then a famine struck all Egypt and Canaan, bringing great suffering, and our fathers could not find food. When Jacob heard that there was grain in Egypt, he sent our fathers on their first visit. On their second visit, Joseph told his brothers who he was, and Pharaoh learned about Joseph's family. After this, Joseph sent for his father Jacob and his whole family, seventy-five in all. Then Jacob went down to Egypt, where he and our fathers died. Their bodies were brought back to Shechem and placed in the tomb that Abraham had bought from the sons of Hamor at Shechem for a certain sum of money.

"As the time drew near for God to fulfill his promise to Abraham, the number of our people in Egypt greatly increased. Then another king, who knew nothing about Joseph, became ruler of Egypt. He dealt treacherously with our people and oppressed our forefathers by forcing them to throw out their newborn babies so that they would die.

"At that time Moses was born, and he was no ordinary child. For three months he was cared for in his father's house. When he was placed outside, Pharaoh's daughter took him and brought him up as her own son. Moses was educated in all the wisdom of the Egyptians and was powerful in speech and action.

"When Moses was forty years old, he decided to visit his fellow Israelites. He saw one of them being mistreated by an Egyptian, so he went to his defense and avenged him by killing the Egyptian. Moses thought that his own people would realize that God was using him to rescue them, but they did not. The next day Moses came upon two Israelites who were fighting. He tried to reconcile them by saying, 'Men, you are brothers; why do you want to hurt each other?'

"But the man who was mistreating the other pushed Moses aside and said,

'Who made you ruler and judge over us? Do you want to kill me as you killed the Egyptian yesterday?'

When Moses heard this, he fled to Midian, where he settled as a foreigner and had two sons.

"After forty years had passed, an angel appeared to Moses in the flames of a burning bush in the desert near Mount Sinai. When he saw this, he was amazed at the sight. As he went over to look more closely, he heard the Lord's voice:

'I am the God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.'

Moses trembled with fear and did not dare to look.

"Then the Lord said to him,

'Take off your sandals; the place where you are standing is holy ground. I have indeed seen the oppression of my people in Egypt. I have heard their groaning and have come down to set them free. Now come, I will send you back to Egypt.'

"This is the same Moses whom they had rejected with the words, 'Who made you ruler and judge?' He was sent to be their ruler and deliverer by God himself, through the angel who appeared to him in the bush. He led them out of Egypt and did wonders and miraculous signs in Egypt, at the Red Sea and for forty years in the desert.

"This is that Moses who told the Israelites,

'God will send you a prophet like me from your own people.'

He was in the assembly in the desert, with the angel who spoke to him on Mount Sinai, and with our fathers; and he received living words to pass on to us.

"But our fathers refused to obey him. Instead, they rejected him and in their hearts turned back to Egypt. They told Aaron,

'Make us gods who will go before us. As for this fellow Moses who led us out of Egypt — we don't know what has happened to him!'

That was the time they made an idol in the form of a calf. They brought sacrifices to it and held a celebration in honor of what their hands had made. But God turned away and gave them over to the worship of the heavenly bodies. This agrees with what is written in the book of the prophets:

"'Did you bring me sacrifices and offerings forty years in the desert, O house of Israel? You have lifted up the shrine of Molech and the star of your god Rephan, the idols you made to worship. Therefore I will send you into exile' beyond Babylon.

"Our forefathers had the tabernacle of the Testimony with them in the desert. It had been made as God directed Moses, according to the pattern he had seen. Having received the tabernacle, our fathers under Joshua brought it with them when they took the land from the nations God drove out before them. It remained in the land until the time of David, who enjoyed God's favor and asked that he might provide a dwelling place for the God of Jacob. But it was Solomon who built the house for him.

"However, the Most High does not live in houses made by men. As the prophet says:

"'Heaven is my throne, and the earth is my footstool. What kind of house will you build for me? says the Lord. Or where will my resting place be? Has not my hand made all these things?'

"You stiff-necked people, with uncircumcised hearts and ears! You are just like your fathers: You always resist the Holy Spirit! Was there ever a prophet your fathers did not persecute? They even killed those who predicted the coming of the Righteous One. And now you have betrayed and murdered him—you who have received the law that was put into effect through angels but have not obeyed it."³⁸

Stephen starts with the promise God made to Abraham and walks them through scripture connecting their treatment of Jesus with their father's treatment of the prophets who told of Jesus saying "They even killed those who predicted the coming of the Righteous One." Their response to Stephen was to stone him to death. This walking through scripture is the pattern set by Christ and followed by his disciples to prove Jesus Christ is the reason for scripture.

Acts chapter 8 includes this account of Philip preaching the Gospel of Jesus Christ:

Now an angel of the Lord said to Philip, "Go south to the road — the desert road — that goes down from Jerusalem to Gaza." So he started out, and on his way he met an Ethiopian eunuch, an important official in charge of all the treasury of Candace, queen of the Ethiopians. This man had gone to Jerusalem to worship, and on his way home

³⁸ Acts 7:1-53

was sitting in his chariot reading the book of Isaiah the prophet. The Spirit told Philip, "Go to that chariot and stay near it."

Then Philip ran up to the chariot and heard the man reading Isaiah the prophet. "Do you understand what you are reading?" Philip asked.

"How can I," he said, "unless someone explains it to me?" So he invited Philip to come up and sit with him.

The eunuch was reading this passage of Scripture:

"He was led like a sheep to the slaughter,
and as a lamb before the shearer is silent,
so he did not open his mouth.
In his humiliation he was deprived of justice.
Who can speak of his descendants?
For his life was taken from the earth."

The eunuch asked Philip, "Tell me, please, who is the prophet talking about, himself or someone else?" Then Philip began with that very passage of Scripture and told him the good news about Jesus.³⁹

One more example: from the book of Acts chapter 13. The apostle Paul here quotes extensively from the Old Testament according to the pattern we have already seen demonstrated. The apostle Paul and his companions are in Pisidian Antioch and as was Paul's habit they first went to the Jewish synagogue:

On the Sabbath they entered the synagogue and sat down. After the reading from the Law and the Prophets, the synagogue rulers sent word to them, saying, "Brothers, if you have a message of encouragement for the people, please speak."

Standing up, Paul motioned with his hand and said: "Men of Israel and you Gentiles who worship God, listen to me! The God of the people of Israel chose our fathers; he made the people prosper during their stay in Egypt, with mighty power he led them out of that country, he endured their conduct for about forty years in the desert, he overthrew seven nations in Canaan and gave their land to his people as their inheritance. All this took about 450 years.

"After this, God gave them judges until the time of Samuel the prophet. Then the people asked for a king, and he gave them Saul son of Kish, of the tribe of Benjamin, who ruled forty years. After removing Saul, he made David their king. He testified concerning him: 'I have found David son of Jesse a man after my own heart; he will do everything I want him to do.'

"From this man's descendants God has brought to Israel the Savior Jesus, as he promised. Before the coming of Jesus, John preached repentance and baptism to all the people of Israel. As John was completing his work, he said: 'Who do you think I am? I am not that one. No, but he is coming after me, whose sandals I am not worthy to untie.'

"Brothers, children of Abraham, and you God-fearing Gentiles, it is to us that this message of salvation has been sent. The people of Jerusalem and their rulers did not recognize Jesus, yet in condemning him they fulfilled the words of the prophets that are read every Sabbath. Though they found no proper ground for a death sentence, they asked Pilate to have him executed. When they had carried out all that was written about him, they took him down from the tree and laid him in a tomb. But God raised him from the dead, and for many days he was seen by those who had traveled with him from Galilee to Jerusalem. They are now his witnesses to our people.

"We tell you the good news: What God promised our fathers he has fulfilled for us, their children, by raising up Jesus. As it is written in the second Psalm:

"'You are my Son; today I have become your Father.'

³⁹ Acts 8:26-35

The fact that God raised him from the dead, never to decay, is stated in these words:

"I will give you the holy and sure blessings promised to David.'

So it is stated elsewhere:

"You will not let your Holy One see decay.'

"For when David had served God's purpose in his own generation, he fell asleep; he was buried with his fathers and his body decayed. But the one whom God raised from the dead did not see decay.

"Therefore, my brothers, I want you to know that through Jesus the forgiveness of sins is proclaimed to you. Through him everyone who believes is justified from everything you could not be justified from by the law of Moses. Take care that what the prophets have said does not happen to you:

"Look, you scoffers, wonder and perish, for I am going to do something in your days that you would never believe, even if someone told you."

As Paul and Barnabas were leaving the synagogue, the people invited them to speak further about these things on the next Sabbath. When the congregation was dismissed, many of the Jews and devout converts to Judaism followed Paul and Barnabas, who talked with them and urged them to continue in the grace of God.

On the next Sabbath almost the whole city gathered to hear the word of the Lord. When the Jews saw the crowds, they were filled with jealousy and talked abusively against what Paul was saying.

Then Paul and Barnabas answered them boldly: "We had to speak the word of God to you first. Since you reject it and do not consider yourselves worthy of eternal life, we now turn to the Gentiles. For this is what the Lord has commanded us:

"I have made you a light for the Gentiles, that you may bring salvation to the ends of the earth."

When the Gentiles heard this, they were glad and honored the word of the Lord; and all who were appointed for eternal life believed.⁴⁰

Notice the apostle Paul said:

...it is to us that this message of salvation has been sent. The people of Jerusalem and their rulers did not recognize Jesus, yet in condemning him they fulfilled the words of the prophets that are read every Sabbath.⁴¹

Why did they write? They wrote so that their words could be fulfilled in Jesus Christ. There are indeed many other examples of this in the book of Acts not to mention the rest of the New Testament. I think these examples are sufficient. Also notice that these examples of reasoning through the scriptures and others found in the New Testament are the model for the essays I write. I am attempting to follow the pattern laid out in scripture and to direct the reader's attention to God's word. So now we have gone the full circle. We started this discussion talking about the statements made by the various human writers of scripture about why they wrote. We also discussed the clear purpose of God these writers also stated. Many writers over many, many hundreds of years were each given a message of truth from God to relay. Each of these individual messages plays a part in God's overall purpose. I hope this discussion has shed some light on the answer to the question: Why did they write?

AUTHOR: James Rattazzi **DATE:** January 2005



This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution-NoDerivs 2.5 License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nd/2.5/).

All scripture quotations, unless otherwise indicated, are taken from the HOLY BIBLE, NEW INTERNATIONAL VERSION®. NIV®. Copyright ©1973, 1978, 1984 by International Bible Society.

Used by permission of Zondervan. All rights reserved.

⁴⁰ Acts 13:14-48

⁴¹ Acts 13:26-27