3ABN SABBATH SCHOOL PANEL
06 – Tuesday – November 3, 2026

Literary Assistants

Read Jeremiah 36:17, 18 and Romans 16:22. What do these verses tell us about the Bible writers' use of literary assistants?

The Bible Writers and Literary Assistants

1. Prophets Sometimes Dictated Their Messages to Scribes

"Then they asked Baruch, saying, 'Tell us now, how did you write all these words—at his instruction?' So Baruch answered them, 'He proclaimed with his mouth all these words to me, and I wrote them with ink in the book.'"
—Jeremiah 36:17–18, NKJV

Jeremiah spoke the message God had given him, while Baruch wrote it down. This shows that a prophet did not always personally put every word on the page.

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2. New Testament Writers Also Used Trained Secretaries

"I, Tertius, who wrote this epistle, greet you in the Lord."—Romans 16:22, NKJV

Paul was the inspired author of Romans, but Tertius served as the person who physically wrote the letter. Literary assistants were used in both Old and New Testament times.

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3. Using an Assistant Did Not Change the Inspired Source

"Take a scroll of a book and write on it all the words that I have spoken to you."—Jeremiah 36:2, NKJV

The message originated with God and was given to Jeremiah. Baruch's role was to record it accurately. Inspiration depended upon the divine source of the message, not upon whose hand held the pen.

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4. The Inspired Author Retained Authority Over the Message

"And Jeremiah commanded Baruch, saying, 'I am confined, I cannot go into the house of the LORD. You go, therefore, and read from the scroll which you have written at my instruction.'"—Jeremiah 36:5–6, NKJV

Jeremiah directed Baruch in writing and delivering the message. Likewise, Paul's use of Tertius did not make Tertius the author of Romans. The assistant supported the communication process, while the inspired messenger remained responsible for the content.

In summary: Bible writers sometimes used scribes to record their messages, but the message remained God's revelation, communicated through the inspired prophet or apostle.

Presumably, Jeremiah could have written his messages, but instead he relied on a trusted scribe to record his prophecies faithfully and to share them with the nation's leaders. Jeremiah is not the only example in the Bible where prophets used the services of a literary assistant to communicate the divine message.

1. **Paul regularly used literary assistants.** Others often physically wrote his letters as he dictated or directed their content, as Tertius did with Romans (Romans 16:22).
2. **Paul authenticated his letters personally.** He added a greeting in his own handwriting to confirm that the entire letter genuinely came from him (Colossians 4:18; 2 Thessalonians 3:17).
3. **Literary assistants may explain differences in writing styles.** The different styles found among Paul's letters—and between Peter's two epistles—may reflect the vocabulary and literary abilities of different secretaries.
4. **The inspired message remained faithful despite differences in wording.** The assistants could influence vocabulary and sentence structure, but the thoughts, truths, and intended meaning came through God's inspired messengers. Thus, inspiration rests primarily in the divinely communicated message rather than in mechanical dictation of every specific word.

God allowed New Testament writers to use literary assistants for several practical and spiritual reasons:

1. To overcome human limitations

Some apostles may have faced physical, educational, or linguistic challenges. Paul apparently experienced difficulties that made writing inconvenient, while Peter's native language was Aramaic rather than Greek.

"See with what large letters I have written to you with my own hand!"—Galatians 6:11, NKJV

2. To communicate clearly to a wider audience

Trained assistants could help arrange thoughts and express them effectively in Greek, the common language of the New Testament world. This enabled the gospel to reach people across different cultures.

"Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature."—Mark 16:15, NKJV

3. To make the work more efficient

The apostles traveled, preached, planted churches, suffered persecution, and provided leadership. Assistants helped record and distribute their inspired messages.

"I, Tertius, who wrote this epistle, greet you in the Lord."—Romans 16:22, NKJV

4. To demonstrate that inspiration works through human cooperation

God did not usually dictate Scripture mechanically. He inspired the prophets' and apostles' thoughts while allowing them to communicate through their own personalities, vocabulary, and trusted coworkers.

"Holy men of God spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit."—2 Peter 1:21, NKJV

The assistants could help with grammar, vocabulary, and sentence structure, but the inspired apostle retained responsibility and authority over the message.

In summary: God used literary assistants because divine inspiration does not eliminate human participation. The message came from God, the inspired writers carried its authority, and their assistants helped communicate it clearly, accurately, and effectively.