

One doesn't have to know who wrote the Bible book that one is reading, but it sure can help. The sixty-six books of the Bible may have had approximately forty different authors. But who knows? Scholars find at least some disagreement on who wrote most of the Bible's books. Put another way, fewer Bible books have undisputed authors. Tradition, though, assigns authorship to most books and does so with good reason. Traditionally assigned authors may not have written those books, but in many cases they very probably contributed writings or accounts, even though later authors compiled, edited, and transmitted their writings. It may not matter much to the lay reader if a certain author who experienced the described event wrote the description that the reader reads or merely related the description to another author or wrote something on which the later author drew.

The point is that having a probable or even possible author in mind can help to understand the author's meaning, that which the author intended. Judges, lawyers, and other readers do a similar thing with legislation, which typically has several or many authors, or has staff authors whose writings legislators would claim. We still read the legislation, which after all we know that someone wrote in a certain era and circumstance, with a theoretical author's intent in mind, to help us understand the meaning and significance of what we are reading. Who the author was, when the author wrote, where the author wrote, and the circumstances of the writing all influence interpretation of the author's meaning. Read the Bible with an idea of the author in mind, especially as the Bible's own text identifies or suggests the author.