

Who was Tertius in the Bible?

Tertius is mentioned in the concluding chapter of the book of Romans: “I, Tertius, who wrote down this letter, greet you in the Lord” (Romans 16:22). Little is known about Tertius besides this reference; it is the only mention of him in the Bible. What we do know about Tertius is his occupation; he served as the amanuensis, or scribe, for the letter.

We often envision Paul sitting alone in a quiet, candlelit cell scribbling away as the Holy Spirit directed. In reality, Romans, like many ancient Greco-Roman letters, was written through dictation. Paul spoke the words, and Tertius wrote them down, like a business executive dictating a memo to a secretary. Letter writers in the ancient world frequently enlisted trained scribes to write down their thoughts. Tertius was a believer in Jesus as well as Paul’s scribe, as his greeting “in the Lord” indicates.

Authors E. Randolph Richards and Brandon O’Brien describe what must have happened between Paul and Tertius: “Ancients had no writing desks. Authors commonly stood and dictated while a scribe sat with a sheet of parchment balanced on his knee or in his lap” (*Misreading Scripture with Western Eyes*, InterVarsity Press, 2012, p.101).

Scribes could make the letter-writing process more efficient, and it seems Paul often used an amanuensis. The apostle Peter wrote and sent his first letter “with the help of Silas” (1 Peter 5:12, NLT), although Silas may have simply been the courier and not the scribe.

When Paul dictated an epistle to a scribe, he always provided a mark of authenticity at the end, a signature of sorts:

“I, Paul, write this greeting in my own hand, which is the distinguishing mark in all my letters. This is how I write” (2 Thessalonians 3:17).

“I, Paul, write this greeting with my own hand” (1 Corinthians 16:21, ESV).

“I, Paul, write this greeting in my own hand” (Colossians 4:18).

“I, Paul, am writing this with my own hand” (Philemon 1:19).

“See what large letters I use as I write to you with my own hand!” (Galatians 6:11).

According to one Christian tradition, Tertius was one of the seventy disciples sent out by Jesus in Luke 10. Tertius is also identified as a bishop in Iconium who was later martyred. Some scholars believe that Tertius was actually Silas, since a Hebrew word similar to Silas's name, translated into Latin, is Tertius. But all of this is conjecture.

The specific details about Tertius are not as significant as the work he did in assisting the apostle Paul. It's obvious that Tertius wished to be best known as the scribe who held the pen and wrote the epistle to the Romans.

The biblical writers' use of scribes in penning their documents should not cause concern about the inspiration of Scripture. In the words of Don Stewart, “These were still Paul's words. The fact that he himself did not actually do the physical writing has nothing to do with the divine inspiration of the finished product. It was Paul's work guided by the Holy Spirit. The same is true for the writings of the prophet Jeremiah and the Apostle Peter. The key is where the words originated—not who put them down in written form. The united testimony of Scripture is that the ultimate author is God Himself”

al-books-written-by-scribe.cfm, accessed 8/14/23).