

INTERPRETING THE GENERAL LETTERS

HANDBOOKS FOR NEW TESTAMENT EXEGESIS
John D. Harvey, series editor

Interpreting the Pauline Letters: An Exegetical Handbook

John D. Harvey

Interpreting the General Letters: An Exegetical Handbook

Herbert W. Bateman IV

Interpreting the Gospels and Acts: An Exegetical Handbook (forthcoming)

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INTERPRETING THE GENERAL LETTERS

An Exegetical Handbook

Herbert W. Bateman IV

AUTHOR

John D. Harvey

SERIES EDITOR

 **Kregel**
Academic

Interpreting the General Letters: An Exegetical Handbook

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*Dedicated to
Herbert W. Bateman Jr.*



CONTENTS IN BRIEF

Preface	13
Abbreviations	15
1. The Genre of The General Letters	19
2. The Background of The General Letters	57
3. The Theology of the General Letters	89
4. Preparing to Interpret the General Letters	127
5. Interpreting Passages in the General Letters	171
6. Communicating the General Letters	209
7. From Exegesis to Exposition of the General Letters	249
8. Selected Sources	285
Glossary	311



CONTENTS

Preface	13
Abbreviations	15
1. The Genre of The General Letters.....	19
<i>Component Parts of a Letter</i>	20
<i>Opening Salutations</i>	27
The Sender of a Letter.....	29
The Recipient of a Letter	31
The Greeting of a Letter.....	33
<i>Types of Epistolary Correspondence</i>	34
Types of Ancient Letters.....	38
Types of General Letters.....	43
<i>Trained Letter-writers and Pseudonymity</i>	49
The Need for Trained Letter-writers	49
Pseudonymity and the General Letters	51
2. The Background of The General Letters.....	57
<i>Greco-Roman World</i>	58
Alexander the Great (356 –323 BCE).....	58
Caesar Augustus (63 BCE –14 CE)	60
<i>The Judean–Roman Relationship</i>	62
Initiation of the Judean-Roman Relationship	62
Toleration of the Judean-Roman Relationship	64
Insurrection against the Judean-Roman Relationship	69
<i>Implications for Interpretation</i>	72
Wisdom in James (mid 40s).....	73
Household Codes and 1 Peter.....	81
Rebellion in Jude (mid 60s).....	84

3. The Theology of the General Letters	89
<i>Era of Promise in the Hebrew Scriptures</i>	90
God's Strategic Plan	91
God's Covenants.....	95
<i>Era of Fulfillment in the General Letters</i>	103
God's Strategic Plan Inaugurated	104
God's Strategic Plan Consummated	113
God's Expectations	116
<i>The Individual Theologies of the General Epistles</i>	118
Letter to the Hebrews	119
Petrine Letters	121
Johannine Letters.....	122
The Letters of James and Jude.....	124
4. Preparing to Interpret the General Letters	127
<i>Step One: Initiate a Translation</i>	128
Confronting Greek Verbs.....	129
Grappling with Greek Clauses	131
Translating the Greek.....	133
<i>Step Two: Identify Interpretive Issues</i>	134
Brief History of the English Bible	135
Theories Behind the Translations	139
Number One: Resolving Open-ended Statements	141
Number Two: Rendering Greek Idioms	142
Number Three: Recognizing English Sensitivities	145
<i>Step Three: Isolate Major Textual Problems</i>	148
Isolating Textual Problems	152
Grouping the External Evidence.....	157
Evaluating the Evidence	162
5. Interpreting Passages in the General Letter	171
<i>Step Four: Interpreting Structure</i>	172
Defining Structural Outlines.....	172
Preparing for the Structural Outline	173
Demonstrating Structural Outlines	182
<i>Step Five: Interpreting Style, Syntax, and Semantics</i>	187
Style of Hebrews.....	187
Syntax of Johannine Letters	192
Semantics of Peter.....	194
<i>Step Six: Interpreting Greek Words</i>	198
How to Choose a Word	199
Synonymous Terms.....	201
Hapax Legomena.....	203
Figure of Speech	205

6. Communicating the General Letters	209
<i>Step Seven: Communicating Exegetically</i>	210
Creating Summary Statements.....	211
Grouping Statements Topically	213
Grouping Topical Summations	219
Exegetical Outline for 3 John.....	223
<i>Step Eight: Communicating the Central Idea</i>	230
Component Parts of the Central Idea	230
Other Types of Outlines.....	232
<i>Step Nine: Communicating Homiletically</i>	235
Introduction	238
<i>The Good</i> (vv.11–12)	239
<i>The Bad</i> (vv.9–10)	240
<i>The Faithful</i> (vv.1–7)	243
Conclusion	245
7. From Exegesis to Exposition of the General Letters.....	249
<i>Jude vv. 5–7</i>	250
Greek Text	251
Text Critical Issue	251
Structural Outline with Simple Translation	252
Exegetical Outline	253
Exposition	254
<i>Hebrews 10:19–25</i>	270
Contextual Orientation.....	270
Greek Text	270
Structural Outline.....	270
Exegetical Outline	273
Exposition	274
8. Selected Sources	285
<i>Sources for Comprehending First Century Letter Writing</i>	285
<i>Sources for Grounding the Text Historically</i>	286
<i>Sources for Building a Biblical Theology</i>	288
<i>Sources for Interpreting Textual Problems</i>	289
<i>Sources for Interpreting Structure, Style, Syntax, and Semantics</i>	291
<i>Sources for Interpreting Greek Words</i>	293
<i>Sources for Improving Communication</i>	294
<i>Guide for Choosing Commentaries</i>	295
Hebrews.....	302
James.....	304
1 Peter.....	306
Johannine Epistles.....	307
2 Peter and Jude	309

Glossary	311
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PREFACE

INTERPRETING THE GENERAL LETTERS: AN EXEGETICAL HANDBOOK, the third of a four volume series, intends to shape the way people think and go about studying and communicating eight books of the New Testament: Hebrews, James, the Petrine letters, the Johannine letters, and Jude. Instructional handbooks or guides like those in Kregel's New Testament Handbook series emerge because authors like me were introduced to and then furthered developed skills passed on to us from other people. I am truly grateful for the Old and New Testament Departments at Dallas Theological Seminary who taught, cultivated, and fostered the exegetical skills compiled in this book. Yet there are others to whom I am grateful for their instruction, guidance, and affirmation.

During my seminary years at Dallas Seminary, Darrell Bock instilled in me skills to think and continues to patiently stretch my thought processes (1983–present). During the early years of my conversion, Tom Larmore taught me skills to evangelize and disciple the ethnically and socially diverse people of east Camden (1978–82). Together with my best friend Bill Rehrer, I learned skills for growing-up and navigating life (1968–2001, d. 2005). During my employment at Kushner's Hardware, Paul Wendt granted me opportunities to develop business skills and extended levels of responsibilities that shaped my work ethic and people skills (1972–80, d. 1996). These people were *living handbooks* whose instruction and lives have guided and shaped me. Yet the *living handbook* to whom this book is dedicated is Herbert W. Bateman Jr., my grandfather, who was born one hundred years ago this year (November 1913).

Herb (or as he was known by family members, Bud) never earned a Ph.D. He never went to college. He never finished high school. He sold

sporting goods his entire life and retired as the manager of Strawbridge and Clothier's sporting goods department in 1976. Yet he has been the most significant *living handbook* of my life. He infused the importance of family and passing on our family heritage through stories of William H. Bateman's immigration from England in 1870s¹ and many other people in our family. More importantly, he imparted the importance of family by faithfully providing for his immediate and extended family members during and after the Great Depression. After his father, Herbert W. Bateman Sr., lost everything in 1929 and died of depression in 1933, Bud provided and cared for his mother until she died in 1964.² Furthermore, while I was growing up in South Jersey, holidays such as Memorial Day, Fourth of July, and Labor Day were always special times at his home. At such traditional family events, he would always grill hamburgers, hotdogs, and of course our family traditional favorite, Texas Tommies.³ These times were exceptional events when sisters, brothers, aunts, uncles, first cousins, second cousins, and grandchildren would get together, relax, tell stories, listen to the Phillies ballgame, play yard games, and just hangout. He had a knack for putting people at ease, relaxing, and just enjoying himself and his family. Finally, he had a keen sense of humor and a hearty as well as contagious laugh.

Although he died in July 1997, I will never forget our family gatherings and those occasional projects we did together: painting the house, stripping and re-roofing the garage, remodeling his kitchen, building furniture together, tilling his vegetable garden every spring, and building a fish pond in his backyard. All of these memories, our relationship, the life skills, and the values he passed on to me are mine for as long as I live. It is for these reasons that I dedicate this book to Herbert (Bud) W. Bateman Jr., who one hundred years ago was born and continues to have an impact on people because he was a *living handbook*.

—HERBERT W. BATEMAN IV
Author

-
- 1 William H. Bateman arrived from England in America at the age of 40 on the Ship *Britannic* (September 29, 1879). Accompanying him was Alice, his wife, who was 30 years old and two sons: Fred age 4 and Jack age 2. After settling in South Jersey, he and Alice had six other children: Herbert W. Bateman Sr. (April 1881), Maybel (January 1884), Wallace (June 1885), Robert (May 1888), Clyde (November 1889), and Clare (September 1891).
 - 2 Prior to FDR and Truman, there was no Social Security deductions or subsequent payments when one's spouse died. So Elizabeth Agin Bateman, like other women of her day who tended to have no labor skills except for being a stay at home mom, was without any source of income. In those days, family had to provided for family. See David McCullough, *Truman* (New York: Simon & Schuster 1992).
 - 3 Texas Tommies are hotdogs sliced down the center with a sliver of cheese placed inside and wrapped in pre-cooked bacon. Grill them and put them on a toasted hotdog bun and you have a "Texas Tommie," although they have no connection with Texas.



ABBREVIATIONS

AB	Anchor Bible
BSA	<i>Annual of the British School at Athens</i>
ABD	<i>Anchor Bible Dictionary</i>
ANTC	Abington New Testament Commentaries
ASV	American Standard Version
BSac	<i>Bibliotheca Sacra</i>
BCE	Before the Common Era (equivalent of B.C.)
BDAG	A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature
BDF	<i>A Greek Grammar of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature</i>
BECNT	Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament
CBQ	<i>Catholic Biblical Quarterly</i>
CE	Common Era (equivalent to A.D.)
CEB	Common English Bible
CEV	Contemporary English Version
DJD	<i>Discoveries in the Judean Desert</i>
DSS	Dead Sea Scrolls
EDNT	<i>Exegetical Dictionary of the New Testament</i>
EEC	The Evangelical Exegetical Commentary
EncDSS	<i>Encyclopedia of the Dead Sea Scrolls</i>
ESV	English Standard Version
ICC	The International Critical Commentary
ISBE	<i>International Standard Bible Encyclopedia</i>
JAOS	<i>Journal of the American Oriental Society</i>
JBL	<i>Journal of Biblical Literature</i>
JETS	<i>Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society</i>

Jos	Josephus
JSNTSup	Journal for the Study of the New Testament Supplemental Series
<i>JSJ</i>	<i>Journal for the Study of Judasim</i>
<i>JSOT</i>	<i>Journal for the Study of the Old Testament</i>
KJV	King James Version
LXX	Septuagint
NASB	New American Standard Bible
NAV	New American Version
NET	New English Translation
NICNT	New International Commentary on the New Testament
NIGTC	New International Greek Testament Commentary
NIV	New International Version
NKJV	New King James Version
NLT	New Living Translation
NRSV	New Revised Standard Version
<i>OEAGR</i>	<i>Oxford Encyclopedia of Ancient Greece and Rome</i>
PNTC	Pelican New Testament Commentaries
RCRD	Rule of the Community and Related Documents
SBLDS	Society of Biblical Literature Dissertation Series
SBLMS	Society of Biblical Literature Monograph Series
SP	Sacra Pagina
RSV	Revised Standard Version
RV	Revised Version
<i>TDNT</i>	<i>Theological Dictionary of the New Testament</i>
<i>TDOT</i>	<i>Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament</i>
<i>TJ</i>	<i>Trinity Journal</i>
<i>TLNT</i>	<i>Theological Lexicon of the New Testament</i>
TNIV	Today's New International Version
<i>TynBul</i>	<i>Tyndale Bulletin</i>
<i>USQR</i>	<i>Union Seminary Quarterly Review</i>
WBC	Word Biblical Commentary
WEB	World English Bible
ZNW	<i>Zeitschrift für die Neutestamentliche Wissenschaft</i>

APOCRYPHA

1 Esd.	First Esdras
2 Esd.	Second Esdras
1 Macc.	First Maccabees
2 Macc.	Second Maccabees
3 Macc.	Third Maccabees
4 Macc.	Fourth Maccabees
Bel	Bel and the Dragon

Judith	Judith
Sir.	Wisdom of Jesus the Son of Sirach (Ecclesiasticus)
Tobit	Tobit
<i>Wisd. Sol.</i>	<i>Wisdom of Solomon</i>

OTHER EXTRA BIBLICAL SOURCES

<i>Ant.</i>	Antiquitates Judaicae
<i>Ap.</i>	Contra Apionem
<i>Barn.</i>	<i>Epistle of Barnabas</i>
<i>Ep. Arist.</i>	<i>Epistle of Aristetas</i>
<i>Jub.</i>	<i>Jubilees</i>
<i>Odes Sol.</i>	<i>Odes of Solomon</i>
<i>Poly Hist.</i>	<i>Polybius History</i>
<i>Pss. Sol.</i>	<i>Psalms of Solomon</i>
<i>Sib. Or.</i>	Sibylline Oracles
<i>T. Adam</i>	Testament of Adam
<i>T. Benj.</i>	Testament of Benjamin
<i>T. Dan.</i>	Testament of Dan
<i>T. Levi</i>	Testament of Levi
<i>T. 12 Patr.</i>	Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs
<i>T. Sol.</i>	Testament of Solomon
<i>War</i>	<i>Bellum Judaicum</i>

QUMRAN SOURCES

CD	<i>Damascus Document</i>	
1QM	<i>1QWar Scroll</i>	
1Q28	1QS	<i>1QRule of the Community</i>
1Q28a	1QSa	<i>1QRule of the Congregation</i>
1Q28b	1QSb	<i>1QRule of Blessings</i>
4Q161	4QpIsa ^a	<i>4QIsaiah Pesher^a</i>
4Q174	4QFlor	<i>4QFlorilegium</i>
4Q175	4QTest	<i>4QTestimonia</i>
4Q246	4QpsDan ar	<i>4QAramaic Apocalypse</i>
4Q252	4QcommGen ^a	<i>4QCommentary on Genesis A</i>
4Q266	4QD ^a	<i>4QDamascus Document^a</i>
4Q285	4QSM	<i>4QSefer ha-Milhamah</i>
4Q376	4QapocrMoses ^b	<i>4QApocryphon of Moses^b</i>
4Q382	<i>4QParaphrase of the Kings</i>	
4Q458	<i>4QNarrative A</i>	
4Q521	<i>4QMessianic Apocalypse</i>	

THE GENRE OF THE GENERAL LETTERS

The Chapter at a Glance

Component Parts of a Letter

Opening Salutations

- The Sender of a Letter
- The Recipient of a Letter
- The Greeting of a Letter

Types of New Testament Epistolary Correspondence

- Types of Ancient Letters
- Types of General Letters

Trained Letter Writers

- The Need for Trained Letter Writers
- Pseudonymity and the General Letters

AS WE BEGIN THIS CHAPTER ABOUT “The Genre of the General Letters,” it is helpful to bear in mind that we are talking about a certain type of literature. Speaking in very broad terms, there are four categories or types of genre in the New Testament: Gospels (Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John), historical narrative (Acts), apoca-

lyptic (Revelation), and the most represented genre, the letter. Of the twenty-seven books of the New Testament, twenty-one are letters. They are pen and ink correspondences that reflect the personality of the sender, that make direct and sometimes indirect references to a person or group of people as though they stood in the author's presence, and that represent only one half of a conversation. Paul's material and the General Letters (Hebrews, James, 1 and 2 Peter, 1–3 John, and Jude) are all deemed letters. This chapter seeks to answer two questions: what do we know about ancient letter writing, and how does what we know affect how we study, interpret, and teach the General Letters?

Tracing developments in ancient letter writing within the Greco-Roman world is at times difficult. Nevertheless, this chapter strives to describe, illustrate, compare, and contrast extant letters written during the first century. More specifically, this chapter identifies and illustrates the component parts of an ancient letter; it describes and demonstrates similarities and differences of a letter's opening salutation; it compares and contrasts the different types of epistolary correspondence within the Greco-Roman world; and finally it divulges information about and displays examples of letters written by trained letter-writers known as amanuenses. Yet at every turn, our goal is to provide a proposal for interpreting the General Letters.

COMPONENT PARTS OF A LETTER

The purpose of this section is to identify and illustrate the component parts of an ancient letter and how they might affect our studying, interpreting, and teaching the General Letters. In order to spot the component parts of an ancient letter, we begin with a contemporary illustration, email. In 1982, the developments of digital messaging known as electronic mail (email) not only exploded here in the United States, it transformed one-way communication universally. Unlike any other development in communication (e.g., the telegraph and the telephone), email has surpassed the effectiveness of communication globally on every level of society. Yet as you know, today's electronic mail messages consist of two components parts: the message *header* and the message *body*. The message *header* generally includes the following fields though the order may vary:

- From: The email address and perhaps the name of the author(s).
- To: The email address indicates primary recipient (multiple allowed) and for secondary recipients indicated below with Cc and Bcc.

- Subject: A brief summary of the topic of the message.
- Date: The local time and date when the message was written.

The message *body*, that larger box where a message is typed, is where our one-way communication occurs. The content may concern personal or private matters, report on or record business transactions, or enlighten someone concerning political, philosophical, or religious issues. In fact, there are instruction manuals with proposals for how to write a proper email.¹ An email message, however, may or may not end with a person's signature block of information. A personally designed signature block is optional. So, email has a twofold structure: a header and a body, but a person's signature block to close the email message is optional. A personal computer, a phone with email capabilities, or an e-reader is a necessary component for message submission or retrieval as opposed to the use of paper, pen, ink, a stamp, and envelope. As we will discover, however, there are similarities and differences. We will address the differences when discussing the need for trained letter-writers later in the chapter, but for now we pause to examine the similarities.

Concerning similarities, the ancient non-canonical Greco-Roman and Jewish letters tend to follow the same structure. A typical letter consisted of three component parts: (1) the letter's opening address and greeting, (2) the letter's body, and (3) the letter's closing salutation. Available today are numerous Greco-Roman and Jewish letters that exemplify this threefold structure. Many of the Greco-Roman letters were found among the Oxyrhynchus Papyri collection discovered in an ancient rubbish dump near Oxyrhynchus, Egypt, a town that flourished during the Roman period in Middle Egypt about 125 miles south of Cairo.² Greco-Roman examples chosen for this chapter were written around the same time as the author of Hebrews,³ Peter, John,

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1. Janis Fisher Chan, *E-Mail: A Write It Well Guide—How to Write and Manage E-Mail in the Workplace* (San Francisco: Write It Well, 2005); *The Microsoft Manual of Style for Technical Publications* (Microsoft Press, 3rd edition, 2004).
 2. Excavations at the dump near Oxyrhynchus, Egypt began as early as 1882. The finds include the writings of Euripides, Sophocles, Menander, OT texts, OT apocrypha, NT texts, NT apocrypha, etc. Yet, 90% of the finds are public and private letters, public and private records, and public and private deeds written by or about ordinary people of antiquity who lived between 301 BCE (Ptolemaic Period) and into the 400s CE (Roman-Byzantine Periods). See W. Hersey Davis, *Greek Papyri of the First Century: Introduction, Greek Text, English Translation, Commentary, Notes* (Chicago, IL: Ares Publishing, 1933).
 3. It is my belief that we are unable to determine who wrote the Epistle to the Hebrews. Nevertheless, for those who wish to know the options and weigh the pros and cons of each, see the series of charts on debated considerations about authorship in Herbert W. Bateman IV, *Charts on the Book of Hebrews* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2012).

James, and Jude composed their letters. The first letter is an official letter of *commendation* of a new governor, Pompeus Planta, written by the Roman Emperor Trajan, to the city of Alexandria, Egypt (98 CE).

LETTER'S OPENING Imperator Caesar nerva Traianus Augustus Germanicus Potifex Maximus tribuniciae potestatis II cousul, to (the city of?) Alexandrians . . .

LETTER'S BODY (Being well aware of) your city's outstanding loyalty towards the emperors, and having in mind the benefits which my deified father conferred on you . . . of his reign, and for my own part also, (over and above?) these claims (of yours), saving a personal feeling of benevolence towards you, I have commended you first of all to myself, then in addition to my friend and prefect Pompeius Planta, so that he can take every care in providing for your undisturbed tranquility and your food-supply and your communal and individual rights. From which (it will be?) clear . . .

LETTER'S CLOSING (the end of the letter is lost)⁴

The second letter is also a letter of *commendation*, and though it is not stated, the writing style of this letter from Theon to Tyrannus on behalf of his brother Heraclides (25 CE) was written by a trained letter-writer, an amanuensis (N.B.: Theon *to his esteemed* . . .).

LETTER'S OPENING Theon to his esteemed Tyrannus, many greetings.

LETTER'S BODY Heraclides, the bearer of this letter, is my brother. I therefore entreat you with all my power to treat him as your protégé. I have also written to your brother Hermias asking him to communicate with you about him. You will confer upon me a very great favour if Heraclides gains your notice.

LETTER'S CLOSING Before all else you have my good wishes for unbroken health and prosperity. Good-bye.⁵

4. P. J. Parsons, ed., *The Oxyrhynchus Papyri*, vol. 42 (London: Oxford University Press, 1974), 76–77.

5. Bernard P. Grenfell and Arthur S. Hunt, eds., *The Oxyrhynchus Papyri*, Part 2 (London: Oxford University Press, 1899), 292.

The third is a *conciliatory* letter from a son, Harpocras, to his father, Thracidashis (76 CE). In a very formal manner, a son informs his father of his recovery from an illness, recounts his delight in receiving a letter from his father, and informs his father of a pair of sandals he has sent.

LETTER'S OPENING Harpocras to Thracidashis father, very many greetings.

LETTER'S BODY Knowing that you will be delighted, I feel obliged to write you that there is nothing the matter with me, but that I was rather lethargic for only a very few days and have been feeling better for some time, and there is nothing the matter with me. I was greatly delighted to read through your letter, in which I learned, my lord father, that you were in excellent health; and because I was tremendously elated in spirit on receiving your letter, I at once thought it might be an oracle of the god, and my health improved remarkably. Receive from Petechon, who is bringing you the letter, a pair of sandals worth 4 dr. Quickly tell me whatever else you have need of, as I still have a few days here.

LETTER'S CLOSING Give my best wishes to Thatres my mother, Thaisous, Sarapion, Ariston, Tycharion, Nice, Eutyech(), and everyone in the house.⁶

The fourth is a *commanding* letter from a man, Ilarion, who has gone to Alexandria (1 BCE). He has written to his sister as well as his wife, Alis, and two other women concerning his whereabouts, provided instructions about the birth of a child, and exhorted them not to worry.

LETTER'S OPENING Ilarion to Alis his sister, many greetings, and to my dear Berous and Apollonarion.

LETTER'S BODY Know that I am still even now at Alexandria; and do not worry if they come back altogether (?), but I remain at Alexandria. I urge and entreat you to be careful of the child, and if I receive a present soon I will send it up to

6. R. A. Coles and M. W. Haslam, eds., *The Oxyrhynchus Papyri*, vol. 42 (London: Oxford University Press, 1980), 116–17.

you. If (Apollonarian?) bears offspring, if it is a male let it be, if a female expose it. You told Aphrodisias “Don’t forget me.” How can I forget you? I urge you therefore not to worry.

LETTER’S CLOSING (No closing salutation.)⁷

The fifth is another *commanding* letter, however, this one is Jewish found at Engedi in Judea. And though it is fragmented with no final salutation (*circa* 124 CE), it is important because it was written by Bar-Kokhba, the leader of the second Jewish revolt against Rome (132–135 CE). He addresses Galgoula to perhaps murder (“destroy”) or possibly punish Galileans. Although Bar-Kokhba’s orders appear a bit harsh, it exemplifies the same sort of structure, though from a different geographical location by a dissimilar ethnic group.

LETTER’S OPENING From Shimeon ben Kosiba to Yeshua ben Galgoula and to the men of the fort, peace.

LETTER’S BODY I take heaven to witness against me that unless you mobilize [perhaps “destroy”?] the Galileans who are with you every man, I will put fetters on your feet as I did to ben Aphlul.

LETTER’S CLOSING (the end of the letter is lost.)⁸

Although the majority of these non-canonical letters of antiquity tend to follow a threefold structure, the authors of their respective letters are not enslaved to it. For instance, letter-writers tend to vary in whether to include a closing salutation. This is also the case concerning our canonical letters. Whereas 1 Peter, 2 John, and 3 John conform to the threefold organization of a letter, others like James eliminate the closing salutation, or in the case of 2 Peter and Jude they close with doxologies. Hebrews and 1 John,⁹ however, are unique in that they open with prologues.

7. Bernard P. Grenfell and Arthur S. Hunt, eds., *The Oxyrhynchus Papyri*, Part 4 (London: Oxford University Press, 1904), 243–44; see the “Letter to a Friend” (2 BCE), which is also a letter of commendation written on behalf of a person named Damas to his good friend.

8. Ibid, 137. Other examples of Jewish letters are provided in Yadin’s chapter, “The Letters Speak,” 124–39. Compare *Encyclopedia of the Dead Sea Scrolls* (2000), “Letters.”

9. Admittedly, 1 John is the least letter-like of all the General Letters. Brown describes it as a commentary on the Gospel of John, Smalley depicts it as a paper, and Kruse declares that “1 John falls into the category of epideictic rhetoric.” Historically Irenaeus (*Haer.* 3.16.8) and Dionysius of Alexandria (Eusebius, *Hist. ecl.* 7.25.8) considered it an epistle. Internally, there are three possible features of 1 John that are epistolary: shared joy (1:4), repeated

General Epistle	Letter's Opening	Letter's Body	Letter's Closing
Hebrews	Prologue 1:1–4	1:5–13:19	13:20–25
James	1:1	1:2–5:20	None
1 Peter	1:1–2	1:3–5:11	5:12–14
2 Peter	1:1–2	1:3–3:6	Doxology 3:17–18
1 John	Prologue 1:1–4	1:5–5:21	None
2 John	vv.1–3	vv.4–11	vv.12–13
3 John	vv.1–2	vv.3–12	vv.13–15
Jude	vv.1–2	vv.3–23	Doxology vv. 24–25

There is a greater and more significant difference between the non-canonical Greco-Roman and Jewish letters exemplified from *The Oxyrhynchus Papyri*, Masada letters, and those of our General Letters. It is length. The average length of a typical Greco-Roman letter, according to Harvey, is 87 words.¹⁰ They could be as short as 18 words and as long as 209 words. Even the Greco-Roman and Jewish letters illustrated earlier in this chapter are of average length. The complete

mention of motive for writing (γράφω: 1:4; 2:1, 7, 8, 12, 13, 14, 21, 26; 5:13), and the repeated use of direct address (τεκνίον: 2:1, 12, 28; 3:7, 18; 4:4, 5; 5:2). Raymond Brown, *The Epistles of John* in AB (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1982), 86–92; Stephen S. Smalley, *1, 2, 3 John* in WBC (Waco, TX: Word, 1984), xxxiii; Colin G. Kruse, *The Letters of John* in PNTC (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000), 29.

10. John D. Harvey, in his chapter on genre, identifies the extreme brevity of letters in comparison to Pauline works in *Interpreting the Pauline Letters: An Exegetical Handbook*, vol. 2 in *Handbooks for New Testament Exegesis*, edited by John D. Harvey (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2012), 29.

letter of *commendation* from Theon to Tyrannus on behalf of his brother Heraclides (25 CE) consists of 59 words in the Greek, the *conciliatory* letter from Harpocras to his father (76 CE) is 127 words in the Greek, and the *commending* letter from Ilarion, who has gone to Alexandria (1 BCE) consists of 79 words in the Greek.

Nevertheless, other Greco-Roman letters may average more words: Cicero's letters average 295 words;¹¹ Seneca's letters average 995 words;¹² and Paul's letters average 2,495 words.¹³ Like Paul's canonical letters, some of the General Letters are longer than others. Hebrews, the longest epistle, consists of 4,954 words while 3 John, the shortest, consists of 219 words. The total number of words used to compose the eight General Letters is 12,532. Thus, the average number of words per General Epistle is about 1,566 words.¹⁴

General Epistle	Longest Chapter	Shortest Chapter	Average Number of Words Per Chapter	Total Number of Words Per Book
Hebrews	Chapter 11 (633 words)	Chapter 5 (232 words)	381 words	4,954 words
James	Chapter 2 (415 words)	Chapter 4 (274 words)	347 words	1,737 words

11. Cicero was born in 106 BCE, six years before the birth of Julius Caesar. He came from a wealthy family, received a superior education, and served in Rome's political arena. After his political career, he wrote a number of philosophical works until he was assassinated in 43 BCE.
12. Seneca may have been born in 4 BCE, around the same time Herod the Great died in Judea. Although born in Spain, he was educated in Rome. He was a playwright, an orator, and philosopher. He tutored the young Nero. He later served as Nero's advisor for several years, and was an influence on the young emperor from 54–62 CE. After he retired, he lost favor with Nero, was accused of conspiring against Nero, and was forced to commit suicide in 65 CE.
13. Harvey, *Interpreting the Pauline Letters*. For a more extensive presentation see Lars Kierspel, "Paul's Letters: Total Number of Words and Vocabulary" in *Charts on the Life, Letters, and Theology of Paul*, Kregel's Charts of the Bible and Theology (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2011), Chart #40.
14. The New Testament chapter and verse divisions do not exist in the original manuscripts. The New Testament text was initially divided into numbered verses by Stephanus and published in his fourth edition of the New Testament (1551). Folklore has it that Stephanus marked the verse division while journeying "on horseback," and that some of the unwelcome divisions by present day scholars arose from the joggling of the horseback that bumped his pen into the wrong places. Although his son confirms that his father did indeed work on the text while on a journey from Paris to Lyons, in all probability the task was accomplished while resting at the inns along the road.

General Epistle	Longest Chapter	Shortest Chapter	Average Number of Words Per Chapter	Total Number of Words Per Book
1 Peter	Chapter 1 (405 words)	Chapter 5 (206 words)	336 words	1,680 words
2 Peter	Chapter 1 (384 words)	Chapter 3 (341 words)	366 words	1,098 words
1 John	Chapter 2 (586 words)	Chapter 1 (207 words)	428 words	2,140 words
2 John	245 words	245 words	245 words	245 words
3 John	219 words	219 words	219 words	219 words
Jude	459 words	459 words	459 words	459 words

In summary then, what have we learned about the component parts of an ancient letter, and how does what we now know affect how we might study, interpret, and teach the General Letters? First, we know that like present-day email, ancient letters had some semblance of structure. Whereas our email has two component parts, a header and a body with an optional personal block to close, letters of antiquity tend to have three component parts: an opening salutation, a body, and an optional closing salutation. Consequently, there are letter-structured divisions that should be first recognized and then honored when studying, interpreting, and teaching James, 1 Peter, 2 Peter, 2 John, 3 John, and Jude. Second, we learned that the General Letters, on average, tend to be much longer than letters of antiquity, which naturally leads us to ask, why? The why question, however, may be answered in part with a closer look at the “Opening Salutations” of ancient letters and in part in our subsequent section about the “Types of Epistolary Correspondence.”

OPENING SALUTATIONS

The purpose of this section is to describe and demonstrate similarities and differences of a letter’s opening salutation, and thereby make some

suggestions for studying, interpreting, and teaching an opening salutation. A quick re-reading of the opening salutations above reveals the brevity in which a *sender* states his name, the simplicity in which the name of the *recipient* is given, and the succinctness of the *greeting*. Authors of the General Letters, on the other hand, tend to expand their opening salutations. The *sender* may attach a noun or adjective to his name as in the case of James, Peter, and Jude. The *recipient* may receive extensive forms of affirmation as in 1 Peter, 2 Peter, 2 John, 3 John, and Jude. And though James offers a concise *greeting*, others use a more expansive twofold (1 Peter, 2 Peter), threefold (2 John, Jude) or the more traditional wishful greeting (3 John).

General Epistle	Opening Salutations	
Hebrews	Prologue	
James	Sender: <i>Expansion</i> Recipient: Greeting:	James slave of God and the Lord Jesus, <i>who is the Christ</i> to the twelve tribes of the Diaspora Greetings
1 Peter	Sender: <i>Expansion</i> Recipient: <i>Expansion</i> Greeting:	Peter apostle of Jesus, <i>who is the Christ</i> to the chosen pilgrims of the Diaspora in Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia May God's grace and peace be multiplied to you
2 Peter	Sender: <i>Expansion</i> Recipient: <i>Expansion</i> Greeting: <i>Expansion</i>	Simon Peter slave and apostle of Jesus, <i>who is the Christ</i> to those who have been granted a faith just as precious as ours through the righteousness of our God and savior Jesus <i>who is the Christ</i> May God's grace and peace be multiplied to you through the knowledge of God and Jesus our Lord
I John	Prologue	

General Epistle	Opening Salutations	
2 John	Sender: Recipient: <i>Expansion</i> Greeting: <i>Expansion</i>	The Elder to the elect lady and her children whom I love in the truth Grace, mercy and peace from God the Father and from Jesus, <i>who is the Christ</i> , the son of the Father, will be ours who live in truth
3 John	Sender: Recipient: <i>Expansion</i> Greeting: <i>Expansion</i>	The Elder to beloved Gaius whom I love in the truth Dear friend, I wish you to prosper and to be in good health, even as your soul prospers.
Jude	Sender: <i>Expansion</i> Recipient: <i>Expansion</i> Greeting:	Jude slave of Jesus, who is the Christ, and brother of James to those Judean believers who are called, who are loved by God the Father and kept for Jesus, who is the Christ May mercy, peace, and love be multiplied to you

Having described and demonstrated similarities and differences of a letter's opening salutation, several observations are worthy of consideration when studying and teaching the diverse opening salutations: sender, recipient, and greeting.

The Sender of a Letter

Concerning the *sender*, some of the General Letters offer no identification (Hebrews, 1 John);¹⁵ in others the sender is either well known (2, 3

15. The Letter to the Hebrews and 1 John tend to break many rules of letter writing. For instance in his excursus on letter writing, Demetrius deplores the use of periods in a letter as if the sender was writing a speech. He avers, it "is absurd." Yet both Hebrews and 1 John begin with a period, which is an extremely long sentence (Heb. 1:1–3; 1 John 1:1–3). And though Hebrews at least has a closing salutation, 1 John does not. Nevertheless, both are deemed letters by most commentators. See Bateman, "The Genre of Hebrews," *Charts on the Book of Hebrews*.

John)¹⁶ or clearly identified by name (James, Peter, and Jude). Typical of all the letters exemplified above, 2 and 3 John offer no expanded or qualifying noun. Yet James, Peter, and Jude offer a rather significant expansion. Whereas James and Jude present themselves as a “slave” (δοῦλος), Peter describes himself as both an apostle¹⁷ and “slave” (δοῦλος).

The noun “slave” (δοῦλος) typically referred to the legal status of a person in the Roman Empire. He or she was attached to a master; was an article of personal property that one buys, sells, leases, gives, bequeaths, jointly owns, and perhaps groups with the animals;¹⁸ and was “duty-bound only to their owners or masters, or those to whom total allegiance is pledged.”¹⁹ The calculated use of the word “slave” (δοῦλος) by Peter, James, and Jude tells us something about their attitudes as members of God’s Kingdom. They present themselves as slaves who were “duty-bound” to Jesus, slaves who were in servitude to and thereby labored for Jesus. Jesus was not just someone they followed for three years (Peter) or a related sibling (James and Jude). Though English translations tend to render “Jesus Christ” (Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ) as though “Jesus” is his first name and “Christ” is his last, the term “Christ” (Χριστοῦ) serves as a title that identifies “Jesus” (Ἰησοῦ) as Messiah. Thus in their respective and expanded identifications of themselves, it is not an elevated expansion as we see in Trajan’s opening salutation (cited above). Rather Peter, James, and Jude present themselves as slaves who belong to Jesus, who is the Christ (Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ).²⁰ Jesus is their King, and they in turn are his slaves in his kingdom. (This way of describing oneself is radical when considering we today tend to emphasize our friendship or perhaps even a sense of equality with Jesus.)

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16. In the Gospel of John there is a noticeable reticence on the part of the author to identify himself explicitly with the Apostle John. In fact, John son of Zebedee is never mentioned by name in the fourth Gospel. He refers to himself as the “disciple whom Jesus loved.” Consistent with this, it is not inconceivable that John preferred to use the title “Elder” (πρεσβύτερος) rather than “Apostle” as a self-designation, although the churches to whom he ministered and wrote would naturally know who he was and what his status was. Thus, it is conceivable that the apostle John wrote the Gospel of John and the Johannine letters.
 17. The noun “apostle” (ἀπόστολος) is a favored designation of Paul. It speaks of a person having been *sent* by someone to someone else. Apostles are messengers from God with extraordinary status (BDAG 122b 2). In the LXX, “apostle” (ἀπόστολος) is the Greek rendering for the Hebrew term *saliah*. The prophet Ahijah, for example, was *sent* to deliver a divine message to the wife of king Jeroboam when she came and asked about her sick son (3 Kgdms. [1 Kings] 14:6; cf. *TDNT*, 1:413–14, 423).
 18. Spicq, in *TLNT* (1994), “δοῦλος.”
 19. BDAG 260, δοῦλος. “For Judaism in the time of Jesus, as for the Greek world, the slave was on a lower level of humanity. By law the slave of non-Jewish birth was classed with immobile goods, had no rights at law and could not own property.” Karl H. Rengstorff in *TDNT* (1983), “δοῦλος.”
 20. In all three salutations, Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ is a genitive of apposition. See Wallace, *Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics: An Exegetical Syntax of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996), 95–98.

The Recipient of a Letter

Concerning the *recipients*, most of the non-canonical Greco-Roman and Jewish letters illustrated in this chapter were addressed to an individual, which is also the case for 3 John. But most of the other canonical letters address a group of people either in a geographical region clearly stated (1 Peter) or to a group of people whereby as interpreters we must do some conjecturing (James, 2 John, Jude).²¹ Still others cite no recipients at all but merely make reference to a group of people throughout their correspondence (Hebrews, 1 John). Our desire here, however, is to consider the obvious expansions, in particular affirming expansions of 1 John, 2 John, and Jude. All three avow to the recipients of their respective letters a form of “love” (ἀγαπάω), an occurrence that appears to be uncharacteristic among the sampling of the non-canonical Greco-Roman letters exemplified above.

On the one hand, John muses, “whom I love *with respect to the truth*” (ὃν ἐγὼ ἀγαπῶ ἐν ἀληθείᾳ)²² to both an individual Gaius (3 John) and then again to a community of believers (2 John).²³ Jude, on the other hand, avers that God loves the group of people to whom he writes. They are “the called” (τοῖς κλητοῖς), “who are loved by God the Father” (ἐν θεῷ πατρὶ ἠγαπημένοις). In light of the simplicity in which the name of the recipient is given in the non-canonical Greco-Roman letters illustrated above we might ask ourselves, why the expansion and what does “love” (ἀγαπάω) mean?

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21. For instance, Jude does not specify a geographical region as Peter does when he named his recipients to be churches located in the Roman regions of Pontus, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia (1 Peter 1:1). Jude merely directed his letter “to those who are called.” Nevertheless, Jude’s relationship with the ostensible leader of the Jerusalem church, James, appears to support the notion that Jude addressed his letter “to those called” followers of Jesus living in Judea. See Herbert W. Bateman IV, *2 Peter and Jude*, The Evangelical Exegetical Commentary (Bellingham: Logos, forthcoming).
 22. The prepositional phrase “in truth” (ἐν ἀληθείᾳ) is probably functioning as a dative of reference, and thereby translated “with respect to truth.” It speaks directly to and affirms the belief or the theology of what Gaius as well as the community of believers believed about Jesus. The dative not only identifies belief, but how that belief is closely tied to how they live. Thus the recipients of both letters are loved not merely for what they believe but for how that belief affects how they live. See Bateman, *A Workbook for Intermediate Greek*, 31.
 23. The “Elect Lady” (ἐκλεκτῆ κυρία) in 2 John is a metaphor for either the Church at large or a specific church located at some distance from the community where the author is living. For the sake of brevity, it seems 2 John is a letter of request to a “sister” church to honor God’s command “that we love one another” (ἵνα ἀγαπῶμεν ἀλλήλους) in contrast to those who refuse to keep the command and deny Jesus’ humanity (“do not confess Jesus, who is the Christ, as having come in the flesh,” (οἱ μὴ ὁμολογοῦντες Ἰησοῦν Χριστὸν ἐρχόμενον ἐν σαρκί). Thus, the “elect lady” (ἐκλεκτῆ κυρία) is a personified reference to a particular local church at some distance from the community where John lives, and the phrase “and to her children” (καὶ τοῖς τέκνοις αὐτῆς) is a reference to the people who attend that church. Bateman, *A Workbook for Intermediate Greek*, 94.

Unlike English, the Greeks had four words for expressing love: (1) στέργω, which generally describes familial affection;²⁴ (2) ἔρως, which generally described the sexual craving of an individual: “So violent was the desire for love that welled up in my heart, pouring out an opaque fog upon my eyes”;²⁵ (3) φιλέω, which is marked by a kindly attitude and good will that came to indicate reciprocal friendship among equals;²⁶ and (4) ἀγαπάω,²⁷ which is very close to φιλέω as an expression of a rational kind of love. Unlike φιλέω, ἀγαπάω links people of different *social classes* and *conditions*, namely linking regular people (an inferior within a hierarchal society) with rulers, benefactors, and fathers (examples of a superior who are the hierarchal society).²⁸

When tracing the concept of “love” (ἀγαπάω) in the Septuagint (LXX), the theological significance of the word (verb: ἀγαπάω; or noun: ἀγάπη) is not always limited to a special kind of divine love as is often communicated from many pulpits. For instance in 2 Samuel 13:1–15, both the verb and noun forms of love describe Amnon’s infatuation with his half-sister Tamar that led to his raping of her. In fact, the majority of the noun appearances of “love” (ἀγάπη) in the LXX describe the love between a man and a woman (Song 2:4, 5, 7; 3:10; 5:8; 7:7; 8:4, 6, 7; cf. Jer. 2:2). Yet God’s (a superior) special love for his people (inferiors) is indeed evident and does carry tremendous theological significance in the LXX (cf. Deut. 10:15; Isa. 43:4a; Hos. 11:1). Similarly, divine acts of “love” (ἀγαπάω) extending from a superior to an inferior appear often in the New Testament. It is in this sense that God loves the world (John 3:16) and knows no racial, social, or cultural boundaries.

So for the recipients of John’s letters, the expansion appears to be a significant affirmation because John, “the *well-known* elder” (ὁ πρεσβύτε-

24. For instance in *Sirach* 27:17 it says, “Love your friend and keep faith with him; but if you betray his secrets, do not follow after him.” For other examples see BDAG 943a, στέργω.

25. Archilochus, *Epodes* 8.245. Notice how the example parallel’s Amnon’s love for his sister, Tamar, whom he rapes. Take note, however, that ἀγάπη and ἀγαπάω are used in 2 Samuel 13. For other examples see Spicq in *TLNT* (1994), ἀγάπη.

26. It has been suggested that φιλέω did not express an emotional attachment, but merely indicated that a person belonged to a social group. It was always marked with a kindly attitude and good will, and yet at times it was employed to be very close to ἀγαπάω. See Spicq in *TLNT* (1994), ἀγάπη; cf. BDAG 1056c, ἀγάπη.

27. Dio Cassius, in his history of Rome, particularly the last years of the Roman Republic and the early Roman Empire, records how Julius Caesar avers to his troops: “I love (ἀγαπῶ) you as a father loves his children” (12.27). Thus, the title of “father” given to emperors is “an invitation for them to love their subjects as their children” (53.18; 56.9). Spicq in *TLNT* (1994), ἀγάπη; Stauffer in *TDNT* (1983), “ἀγαπάω, ἀγάπη”; cf. BDAG 6a, ἀγάπη.

28. This discussion about “love” first appeared in *A Workbook for Intermediate Greek*, 115. The discussion was expanded and reapplied in my commentary for *2 Peter and Jude*, forthcoming.

ρος),²⁹ loves those to whom he writes as a father (a superior) loves his children (inferiors; see note 27). This unique expansion makes public a noteworthy relationship from which John launches a desired compliance to extend hospitality to itinerant preachers (3 John v.8) and a desired obedience of God's command that believers love one another (2 John v.5). For the recipients of Jude's letter, however, Jude's point is simply that people, who are "called" have been loved by God. God (a superior) has already loved the group of people (inferiors) who are called. Thus in verse 21 when Jude avers, "keep yourself" (ἑαυτοὺς . . . τηρήσατε) in God's love, it is an expectation or responsibility of the believers (inferiors) to remain *in* the love relationship with God (a superior), which God himself initiated with the recipients in verse 1. Thus, the striking expansion of the word "love" (ἀγαπάω) serves to reveal a significant relationship upon which all three letters build.

The Greeting of a Letter

Concerning the *greeting*, some salutations are merely "greetings" (χαίρειν) as exemplified earlier from Greco-Roman letters (cf. Acts 15:23; 23:26) or "peace" (*shalom*) as in the Jewish letter from the period of the Bar-Kokhba revolt (132–135 CE). Thus, they are merely, shall we say, a cultural cliché. In a similar way, the opening greeting in James, 2 Peter, and 3 John give the impression to be a mere cultural formality, and thereby add little or nothing to developments in their respective letters.³⁰ Yet, other greetings look as though they are more than a cliché or formality. Consequently, people differ over how much importance to place on the opening and closing formulas of a given letter, since ancient letter-writers seem to pay little attention to their

29. The addition of "well-known" is interpretive based upon a semantical category for the article "the" (ὁ). In this case the articles before "elder" (πρεσβύτερος) in both 2 John v.1 and 3 John v.1 serve to point out something about the elder, namely he is well-known or familiar to the readers. Thus, John need not name himself. See footnote #16 and Wallace, *Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics*, 225.

30. Davids compares James' use of the standard Greek epistolary "greeting" (χαίρειν) with Paul's double formula "grace to you and peace" (χάρις ὑμῖν καὶ εἰρήνη) and reasons "either because he lacked Paul's creativity and mastery of the Greek or because the Hellenistic redactor/scribe had principal responsibility for v 1 and did not think in Paul's more Aramaic terms." Peter Davids, *Commentary on James* in *New International Greek Testament Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1982), 64. "3 John displays," muses Lieu, "many of the features of the ordinary letters surviving from the ancient world, including the framing epistolary conventions such as a health wish (v 2), a thanksgiving (v. 3), a promise of a visit to compensate for the brevity of the letter (vv. 13–14), and the sharing of greetings with a third party before a closing farewell (v. 15). Judith M. Lieu, *I, II, & III John* in *The New Testament Library* (Louisville: John Knox Press, 2008), 265. For other examples of letter of commendation, see Clinton W. Keyes, "The Greek Letter of Introduction," *Journal of Philology*, 56.1 (1935): 28–44, especially page 35.

opening salutations.³¹ Nevertheless, Jude’s threefold greeting—“May mercy, peace, and love ‘be multiplied’ (πληθυσθεῖν)³² to you”—looks to be calculated because Jude returns to these three themes later during his admonitions to the godly ones. He exhorts his readers to extend mercy to others (vv. 21b–23), to be different from those who were divisive (i.e., live in peace; vv. 19–20), and to remain in love (v. 21a).

In summary then, what have we learned about the opening salutation of a non-canonical letter; and how does what we now know affect how we might study, interpret, and teach the opening salutation of a General Epistle? First, we know that an opening salutation generally consists of a sender, a recipient, and some form of a greeting. Furthermore, brevity appears to be an outstanding characteristic of ancient non-canonical Greco-Roman letters. This brevity is particularly significant when comparing them to many of the opening salutations of the General Letters. So when a sender of a canonical letter attaches “slave” to his name, it appears to communicate a significant attitude as does the contemplatively inserted term “love” (ἀγαπάω), for it may undergird an epistle’s theological concern (2, 3 John) or perhaps even foreshadow at least an aspect of the sender’s later admonition (Jude vv.1, 21–23). Consequently, when studying, interpreting, and teaching the General Letters some attention should be given to the various expansions attached to the sender’s name, the apparent affirmations extended to the recipients, and the chosen extension for an opening greeting because any one of these may reemerge as a significant theme later in the letter. These significant expansions naturally lengthen the canonical letters, and as we shall see, the type of correspondence also contributes to why the General Letters are longer than the average non-canonical Greco-Roman letter.

TYPES OF EPISTOLARY CORRESPONDENCE

The purpose of this section is to compare and contrast the different types of epistolary correspondence within the Greco-Roman world,

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31. Stanley K. Stowers, *Letter Writing in Greco-Roman Antiquity* in *Literature of Early Christianity* edited by Wayne A. Meeks (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1986), 20.
 32. The added passive infinitive, ‘be multiplied’ (πληθυσθεῖν), may be a noteworthy expansion for not only Jude but for the Petrine Letters because it is a wish for God’s blessing. Semantically, Achtemeier avers, “the passive form of the verb “multiply” (πληθυσθεῖν) is probably a ‘reverential passive,’ a form used among Jews to avoid mentioning God’s name . . .” Paul J. Achtemeier, *1 Peter* in *Hermeneia* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1996), 89. God’s multiplying of “grace and peace” in the midst of suffering under a hierarchal system might suggest something more in 1 Peter. Certainly in Jude’s case “the blessings that Jude emphasizes are woven,” according to Green, “into the fabric of his epistle and, therefore, this wish-prayer serves as an introduction to the fundamental themes he will take up.” Gene Green, *Jude & 2 Peter*, BECNT (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2008), 50.

and thereby offer some suggestions as to how determining the type of a General Epistle may benefit our studying, interpreting, and teaching them. As we noted above, tracing developments in ancient letter writing within the Greco-Roman world is difficult. Nevertheless, it seems the earliest extant guidelines concerning letter writing come from the renowned Athenian orator, Isocrates.³³ He was the first to treat rhetorical prose as a work of art. His most famous written rhetorical discourse was his plea for Athens and Sparta to join forces against Persia (380 BCE). Isocrates believed, however, that *letter-writing was to differ from written rhetorical discourses*.³⁴ A variety of his letters have survived over the years. His ten extant letters, written from 385 to 338 BCE, illustrate several very early epistolary types of letters, for he wrote letters that admonished, advised, counseled rulers, exhorted, encouraged and dissuaded, introduced and commended a friend, and petitioned another person.

Letters of Isocrates (436–338 BCE)	Letter to Admonish	Letter to Advise	Letter to Counsel	Letter to Exhort	Letter to Encourage & Dissuade	Letter to Introduce- Commend	Letter to Request- Petition
<i>Busiris</i> (ca. 385)	√						
<i>To Dionysius</i> (368 or 367)		√					
<i>To the Children of Jason</i> (359 or 358)					√		

33. Isocrates was born in 436 BCE, eight years before Plato. His birth into a wealthy Athenian family afforded him an excellent education in Athens and he eventually joined the circle of Socrates. His most significant contribution was to the development of rhetorical theory, philosophy, and education in Ancient Greece. Isocrates' model of education guided educators in rhetoric for centuries. Tradition suggests that Isocrates starved himself to death at the age of 98, after Philip of Macedon defeated Athens at the Battle of Charonea (338 BCE).

34. This point strikes me as significant, namely that letters differ from rhetorical discourses because many contemporary commentators look for rhetorical structure within the body of a General Epistle. They study, interpret, and teach canonical letters as though they are rhetorical discourses and not ancient letters. At times, such attempts appear forced and out of sync with the general distinction between rhetorical speech and personal letter.

Letters of Isocrates (436–338 BCE)	Letter to Admonish	Letter to Advise	Letter to Counsel	Letter to Exhort	Letter to Encourage & Dissuade	Letter to Introduce- Commend	Letter to Request- Petition
<i>To Archidamus</i> (356)			√				
<i>To the rulers of the Mytilenaeans</i> (350)							√
<i>To Philip of Macadon</i> (346)			√	√			
<i>To Timotheus</i> (345)						√	
<i>To Antipater</i> (ca. 340)						√	
<i>To Alexander</i> (ca. 342–340)					√		
<i>To Philip of Macadon</i> (338)			√	√			

Based upon these ten letters, Sullivan suggests an Isocratean theory of letter writing.³⁵

1. Letters are written communications sent directly from one person to another.
2. These communications may perform a wide variety of rhetorical tasks, of both private and public natures.

35. Robert G. Sullivan, “Classical Epistolary Theory and Letters of Isocrates” in *Letter-Writing Manuals and Instruction from Antiquity to the Present*, ed. Carol Poster and Linda C. Mitchell (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2007), 7.

3. As written communications, they have all the strengths and weaknesses of other written forms and may clash with sensibilities more attuned to oral discourse.
4. Letters should be opened with a formulary address of either a long nominative <dativ> infinitive construction, or a truncated form indicating the receiver in the dative case.
5. Formulary closings are available and optional.
6. Letters of patronage have relatively settled ways of introducing clients and asking for the aid of the receiver in reminding the client of his patron's intercession.

So for Isocrates, it appears letters were to have particular symmetries and stylistics: they should be short, personal, and written in a simpler style than that of a speech, and they were not to be impertinent, ostentatious, or excessively elaborate.

Over time, guidelines for letter writing were developed, duplicated, and distributed for public consumption—in much the same way as “how to” manuals have been produced to guide a person when composing different types of email depending on the situation.³⁶ Consequently, we have today an excursus on ancient letter writing and two instructional manuals from the Greco-Roman period. These tools were intended to teach and model how to compose different types of letters. We begin with the earliest extant epistolary tool employed for instructing a person in how to write a letter. It is a brief excursus about letter-writing found in a work entitled *On Style*, attributed to Demetrius of Phalerum, and considered by most to be from the first century BCE. Unlike Isocrates from whom we can merely surmise ancient letter writing practices, Demetrius lists guidelines for letter writing from which the following is a selective summary.³⁷

1. Letters are written communications as though speaking with a friend.
2. Letters should reveal a glimpse of character that is of reasonable length.

36. While White limits ancient letter types to two broad kinds of messages: “(1) the imparting/ seeking of information, and (2) the making of requests/commands,” he too recognizes that “these epistolary functions come to expression in the body, whereas the broader maintenance of contact is characteristically conveyed by the opening and closing.” John White, “The Greek Documentary Letter Tradition Third Century BCE to Third Century CE,” *Semeia* 22 (1981): 89–106, especially 95.

37. Abraham J. Malherbe, *Ancient Epistolary Theorists* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1988), 16–19.

3. Letters are to be structured with a degree of freedom granted to the author, but extensive use of the period is “absurd.”
4. Letter-writers are to “remember there are epistolary topics, as well as epistolary style.”
5. Letters ought to evidence both a graceful and plain style.
6. Although Demetrius spoke about letter-writing as merely an excursus, there are two ancient how-to manuals devoted to writing letters. Both contain a theory of letter-writing followed by a descriptive model for the various types of letters.

Types of Ancient Letters

The first, *Letter Types (Typoi Epistolikoi)*, is falsely ascribed to Demetrius and frequently referred to as Ps.-Demetrius. Although broadly dated somewhere between the second century BCE and the third-century CE, there are six pages of text that indicate some standardized body of epistolary theory. It seems the intended audience was students training to be professional letter-writers. The manual not only names and defines twenty-one different types of letters, it also identifies the goals for each type of letter, explains the formulaic and categorical nature for each type, and offers an example. For instance, the suggestion given to a person who desires to commend someone needs to write a *commendatory type of letter*; a person who desires to expose unworthy conduct needs to write a *vituperative type of letter*; a person who wants to exhort or dissuade someone from something should do so via an *advisory type of letter*; a person who wants to teach what should and should not be done would do so via an *admonishing type of letter*; or if a person desired to express sympathy or console another he would do so in a *consoling type of letter* and thereby consider the following suggestions.³⁸

The commendatory type, which we write on behalf of one person to another, mixing in praise, at the same time also speaking of those who had previously been unacquainted as though they were (now) acquainted. In the following manner:

So-and-so, who is conveying this letter to you, has been tested by us and is loved on account of his trustworthiness. You will do well if you deem him worthy of hospitality both for your sake and his, and indeed for your

38. The four examples and translations are from Abraham J. Malherbe, *Ancient Epistolary Theorists* (Atlanta, GA: Scholars Press, 1988), 33, 35, 37.

own. For you will not be sorry if you entrust to him, in any matter you wish, either words or deeds of a confidential nature. Indeed, you, too, will praise him to others when you see how useful he can be in everything.

It is *the vituperative type* when we bring to light the badness of someone's character or the offensiveness of (his) action against someone. In the following manner:

Even if I should remain silent, you would hear from others how meanly and how unworthily of their conduct So-and-so has treated those men who have been entrusted with responsibility. For it is proper to write concerning matters about which some people might not know. But it is superfluous to write concerning matters that everybody knows about and that are being noise abroad by rumor itself, as it is to make known those things which are exposed by the very fact of their being kept secret.

It is *the advisory type* when, by offering our own judgment, we exhort (someone to) something or dissuade (him) from something. For example, in the following manner:

I have briefly indicated to you those things for which I am held in high esteem by my subjects. I know, therefore, that you, too, by this course of action can gain the goodwill of your obedient subjects. Yet, while you cannot make many friends, you can be fair and humane to all. For if you are such a person, you will have a good reputation and your position will be secure among the masses.

It is *the admonishing type* one which indicates by its name what its character is. For admonition is the instilling of sense in the person who is being admonished, and teaching him what should and should not be done. In the following manner:

You acted badly when you ill-treated a man who had conducted himself well and had lived according to reason and had, generally speaking, done you no harm. Realize, therefore, that this action (of yours) deserves an apology. Indeed, if you had been so treated by some else, you would have taken it amiss and demanded justice for what had been done to you. Do not, then, think that the person who would rebuke sins had neither parents nor a (proper) upbringing, nor, worst of all, that he has no relative or friend.

The consoling type is that written to people who are grieving because something unpleasant has happened (to them). It is as follows:

When I heard of the terrible things that you met at the hands of thankless fate, I felt the deepest grief, considering that what had happened had not happened to you more than to me. When I consider that such things are the common lot of all, with nature establishing neither a particular time or age in which one must suffer anything, but often confronting us secretly, you, I decided to do so by letter. Bear, then, what has happened as lightly as you can, and exhort yourself just as you would exhort someone else. For you know that reason will make it easier for you to be relieved of your grief with the passage of time.

These five examples will prove significant later in this section when discussing the types of General Letters.

The second manual is entitled *Epistolary Types (Epistolimaioi Kharaktères)*. Like Ps.-Demetrius, it too has been falsely ascribed to someone, Libanius. Although difficult to date, it probably dates to the fourth-century CE but evolved gradually over time at the hands of many authors. Like Isocrates and Ps.-Demetrius, Ps.-Libanius considered a letter to be a “written conversation” addressed to someone who was not physically present. Unlike the previous manual, however, the intended audience was apparently elite members of society who could not afford professional letter-writers or who wished to write their own letters. The manual begins with an introduction followed by naming forty-one letter types. It then offers a summary of epistolary theory and provides a collection of model letters illustrating each type. For instance, the suggestion given to a person who needs to exhort a person to avoid something would write a *paraenetic type of letter*; a person who desires to commend a person would write a *commendatory type of letter*; a person who wants to empower someone would write an *encouraging type of letter*; a person who wanted to console someone would write an *consoling type of letter*; a person who needs to speak to someone’s character might write a *maligning type of letter*; or finally a person who may need to address more than one issue would write a *mixed type of letter* and thereby would consider the following suggestions.³⁹

The paraenetic style is that in which we exhort someone by urging him to pursue something or to avoid something. Paraenesis is divided into two parts, encouragement and dissuasion. Some also call it the advisory style, but do so incorrectly, for paraenesis differs from advise. For paraenesis is hortatory speech that does not admit of a counter-statement, for

39. The examples and translations are from Abraham J. Malherbe, *Ancient Epistolary Theorists* (Atlanta, GA: Scholars Press, 1988). For the paraenetic style and letter see pages 69, 75; the commendation style and letter see pages 69, 75; the encouraging style and encouraging letter see pages 71, 81; the consoling style and sympathetic letter see pages 71, 77; maligning style and letter see pages 71, 79; mixed style and letter see pages 73, 81.

example, if someone should say that we must honor the divine. For nobody contradicts this exhortation were he not mad to begin with. But advice is advisory speech that does admit of a counter-statement . . .

The paraenetic letter. Always be an emulator, dear friend, of virtuous men. For it is better to be well spoken of when imitating good men than to be reproached by all men while following evil men.

The commendatory style is that in which we commend someone to someone. It is also called the introductory style.

The letter of commendation. Receive this highly honored and much sought-after man and do not hesitate to treat him hospitably, this doing what behooves you and what pleases me.

The encouraging style is that in which we encourage someone and make them fearless.

The letter of encouragement. Be completely fearless, and hold your ground while living honorably, because God is well disposed toward you. For God everywhere helps the person who lives an upright life.

The consoling style or sympathetic is that in which we console someone over the troubles that befell them.

The consoling letter. I was grieved in soul when I heard of the terrible things that had befallen you, and I besought God to free you from them. For it behooves friends to pray that they may see their friends forever free of evils.

The maligning style is that in which we attack someone's character for what he has done.

The maligning letter. So-and-so, who has a very bad character, has caused me much harm. For, after having acted as though he were my friend, and having received many favors from me when he as not able to repay me measure for measure because he possessed no noble qualities, he brought the greatest evils down upon me. Be on your guard, therefore, against this man, lest you, too experience terrible trials at his hands.

The mixed style is that in which we compose from many styles.

The mixed letter. I know that you live a life of piety, that you conduct yourself as a citizen in a manner worthy of respect, indeed, that you

adorn the illustrious name of philosophy itself, with the excellence of an unassailable and pure citizenship. But in this one thing alone do you err, that you slander your friends. You must avoid that, for it is not fitting that philosophers engage in slander.

As it was the case for the five examples provided from Ps.-Demetrius, these six examples will prove significant later in this section when discussing the types of General Letters. In conclusion, both manuals offer suggestions for how to write a commendatory and consoling type letter, so there is overlap between the two manuals. Both manuals look as though they describe similar types of letters but name them differently as in the case of the vituperative and maligning types of letters as well as the advising and paraenetic types of letters.⁴⁰ Then there are letters unique to both, which is the case concerning the mixed, admonishing, and encouraging letter. The following chart lists the various types of letters identified, taught, and exemplified in the Ps.-Demetrius and Ps.-Libanius manuals.⁴¹

Types of Greco-Roman Letters in Ps.-Demetrius and Ps.-Libanius			
Twelve Letters Common to Both	Nine Letters Unique to Ps.-Demetrius	Twenty-eight Letters Unique to Ps.-Libanius	
Blaming	Accounting	Angry	Maligning*
Censorious	Accusing	Commanding	Mixed*
Commendation*	Admonishing*	Conciliatory	Mocking
Congratulatory	Advisory*	Consulting	Paraenetic*
Consoling*	Allegorical	Contemptuous	Praying

40. Many people refer to the General Letters as paraenetic letters. Yet Demetrius describes the “advisory type” letter as exhorting someone to something or dissuading someone from something, and in a similar manner Libanius describes the “paraenetic type” letter as involving “encouragement and dissuasion.” The person is exhorted, by urging, “to pursue something or to avoid something.” Compare Stowers, *Letter Writing in Greco-Roman Antiquity*, 96 and Greene, *Jude & 2 Peter*, 37–38 with Malherbe, *Ancient Epistolary Theorists*, 35, 69.

41. The asterisks (*) are the types of letters defined and exemplified in this chapter. Consoling letters in Ps. Demetrius and sympathetic letters in Ps. Libanius are viewed as synonymous types of letters.

Types of Greco-Roman Letters in Ps.-Demetrius and Ps.-Libanius			
Twelve Letters Common to Both	Nine Letters Unique to Ps.-Demetrius	Twenty-eight Letters Unique to Ps.-Libanius	
Friendly	Apologetic	Counter accusing	Provoking
Inquiring	Responding	Declaratory	Repenting
Ironic	Supplicatory	Denying	Replying
Praising	Vituperative★	Didactic	Reporting
Reproachful		Diplomatic	Reproving
Thankful		Encouraging★	Requesting
Threatening		Enigmatic	Submissive
		Erotic	Suggestive
		Grieving	Insulting

So just as there are different types of ancient non-canonical letters, there are different types of General Letters.

Types of General Letters

Naturally, any letter's type is reflected in the composition of the body of the letter. In other words, to identify a letter's type we need to *look for performance goals stated or identify specific descriptive features in the body of the letter* to determine the type of letter. As we advance our discussion, however, it will become painfully obvious that assigning *every* biblical letter to any one of these ancient forms of correspondence could be debated. Yet by the same token, merely to limit the labeling of a General Epistle to "an ancient letter" based solely upon structure (an opening salutation, body, closing salutation) seems to ignore the historical reality that ancient non-canonical letters addressed topics that warrant the writing of diverse types of letters. So we need to bear in mind when studying the General Letters that they too are diverse in character, intention, and type that employ rhetorical methods (though different from rhetorical works). So the question to ask is simply: what types of letters are evident among the

General Letters? At this point, we will point out three types of ancient letters represented among the General Letters: a commendation type of letter, a mixed vituperative and admonishing type of letter, and a mixed consoling and paraenetic type of letter.

Commendatory Letter. Moving beyond the fact that 3 John consists of an *opening* salutation (vv.1–2), a *body* (vv.3–12), and a *closing* salutation (vv.13–15), the threefold body of John’s letter, visibly marked by way of John’s use of “beloved” (ἀγαπητέ),⁴² exhibits several features typical of the *commendatory styled* letter. First, “the elder” (ὁ πρεσβύτερος) writes to Gaius (v.1) on behalf of several itinerate ministers of the gospel (vv.6b, 12). Second, the letter praises (commends) Gaius for hospitality he extended to traveling preachers whom he previously did not know (vv.3, 5–6a), but then commends these same itinerant preachers and others as people worthy of further hospitality (v.6b). The reason for further kindness is due to their mission and dependence on fellow followers of Jesus (v.7). Third, John commends Demetrius as having been tested by the elder (v.12). Finally, the intention behind “the elder’s” mitigated expectation to extend hospitality to these commended itinerant preachers is ultimately a benefit to Gaius (vv.8, 10).⁴³ Terms like “tested” and phrases like “loved on account of his trustworthiness,” “worthy of hospitality,” and beneficial “both for your sake” are the features expected of a letter of commendation.⁴⁴ Thus, it would appear safe to say that 3 John exhibits features characteristic of a *letter of commendation*.

Vituperative & Admonishing Letter. Moving beyond the fact that Jude’s

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42. In his letter of recommendation, John first uses “beloved” (ἀγαπητῶ) to describe his friendship with Gaius. In verse 2, John shifts to direct address using the vocative case (ἀγαπητέ). John purposefully addresses Gaius as “beloved” three times (vv. 2, 5, and 11) to transition from one section to another throughout the body of the letter. Although the transitional marker “beloved” (ἀγαπητοί) is a direct address, it is a term of endearment and personal warmth. In Johannine letters it occurs 10 times (1 John 2:7, 3:2, 3:21, 4:1, 7, 11; 3 John vv.1, 2, 5, 11).
43. For commentators who consider 3 John to be a letter of commendation see George Strecker, *The Johannine Letters*, Hermeneia (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1989), 253–54; Robert W. Yarbough, *1–3 John*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2008), 363. Compare Chan-Hie Kim, *Form and Structure of the Familiar Greek Letter of Recommendation*, SBLDS 4 (Missoula: Scholars, 1972).
44. Stowers highlights two fundamental elements of a commendatory letter: “the writer and the recipient share some positive relationship of reciprocity and are most often social peers in some respect (e.g., friends, family, government officials),” and “the writer intercedes on behalf of a third party in order to perform a favor for or through the third party and to establish appositive social relationship between the recipient and the third party.” Stowers, however, views 3 John to exhibit freedom in that though a letter of recommendation (vv. 8, 10), it “contains a short invective (*psegin*) in vv.9–10 and exhortation in vv.11–12.” Stanley K. Stowers, *Letter Writing in Greco-roman Antiquity* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1986), 156. Funk views 3 John as a petition with commendation. Robert W. Funk, “Form and Structure of II John and III John,” *JBL* 86, no. 4 (1967): 424–30, esp. 427.

letter consists of an *opening* salutation (vv.1–2), a *body* (vv.3–23), and a *closing* doxology (vv.24–25), the *body* of Jude’s letter has the look of a mixed letter: a vituperative styled and an advisory (or paraenetic) styled letter.⁴⁵ Jude’s three-part body begins with a stated performance goal (vv. 3–4) whereby he introduces vituperative and advisory features. Jude then advances to his vituperative disclosures. The ungodly people, namely “godless *people*” (ἀσεβείς) who deny Jesus’ Messiahship (v. 3), are unmistakably compared with rebels of a worthless cause and thereby destined for divine punishment (vv. 5–16). Jude exposes several character flaws about a group of people who have maneuvered their way, in a secretive manner, into Judean churches. He draws lucid attention to the “badness” of that group of individuals and the “offensiveness” of their actions, which in Jude’s case may be those involved in the mounting atmosphere of rebellion and insurrections against Rome during the 60s. (More will be said about this topic in our next chapter.) The offensiveness of these “godless *people*” (ἀσεβείς) is unmistakably evident in several triplet portraits of “these *people*” (οὗτοι). Thus, Jude makes typological comparisons and disclosures of several Old Testament portraits within his “vituperative type” or “maligning type” of letter.

Overview	Threefold Portraits			Jude
OT Paradigm of Divine Punishment of the Rebellious	<i>Remember the Wilderness generation</i>	<i>Remember the Fallen angels</i>	<i>Remember Sodom & Gomorrah</i>	vv.5–7
Unbecoming Scruples	Self-polluting	Rebels	Slanderers	v.8
OT Paradigm of Divine Punishment of the Godless	They are Like Cain	They are Like Balaam	They are Like Korah	v.11
Unbecoming Scruples	Blemishes	Brazen	Selfish	v.12
Unbecoming Scruples	Disgruntled murmurers	Boastful	Patronizing	v.16

45. For commentators who consider Jude to be a vituperative and advisory letter see Gene L. Green, *Jude & 2 Peter*, BECNT (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2008), 37–38, 55–56.

After these compelling disclosures about a group of shady characters with questionable scruples, Jude proceeds to advise his Judean readers and instill in them steps to be taken to remedy their situation (vv.17–23). Whereas Jude first advises the churches in Judea “to fight” (ἐπαγωνίζεσθαι) for their faith (v.3), he now teaches or offers instructions concerning what their “fight” for their faith involves. Jude exhorts: “keep yourselves in God’s love” (ἐαυτοὺς ἐν ἀγάπῃ θεοῦ τηρήσατε; v.21a), “be merciful to believers who doubt” (οὓς μὲν ἐλεᾶτε διακρινομένους; v.22), “save other people from the fire” (οὓς δὲ σώζετε. ἐκ πυρὸς ἀρπάζοντες; v.23a), and “be merciful with fear” (οὓς δὲ ἐλεᾶτε ἐν φόβῳ) to those who disbelieve (v.23b). Thus, the *body* of Jude’s letter evidences features of a mixed letter: a vituperative description of the godless (vv.5–16) and strong advice to the godly (vv.17–23) as stated in Jude’s preempted performance goals that opened the body of his letter (vv.3–4). In a similar way, 2 Peter is a mixed letter that has vituperative (2:1–22) and advisory (or paraenetic) features (1:5–11; 3:1–18a).⁴⁶

Consoling & Paraenetic Letter. Moving beyond the fact that Peter’s letter consists of an *opening* salutation (1:1–2), a *body* (1:3–5:11), and a *closing* doxology (5:12–14), the *body* of 1 Peter looks like a mixed letter: a consoling and paraenetic (or advisory) styled letter. It consists of three-parts: a consoling styled opening (1:3–5); a two-part parenthesis styled set of advice/exhortations (1:13–2:10 and 2:11–4:11); and a consolation styled closing (4:12–5:11).⁴⁷ As is typical of the consoling letter, Peter is aware of the “terrible things” his readers are suffering and thereby is sympathetic to their situation (1:6–7; 2:18–23; 3:9, 13–18; 4:1–4, 12–19; 5:8–10). He begins with a theological consolation about a person’s new life in Jesus that appears to govern the entire letter.⁴⁸ Thus, the *body* of Peter’s letter has features of a mixed letter: a consoling styled letter (1:3–5; 4:12–5:11) and exhortations to persevere as people of God typical of a paraenetic (or advisory) styled letter (1:6–4:11).

In summary then, what have we learned about the types of ancient letters; and how does what we now know affect how we might study, interpret, and teach the General Letters? We learned that letters were different from rhetorical discourses, had divergent styles, and prescribed guidelines existed for each type of letter. So how does what we now

46. Green, *Jude & 2 Peter*, 168–69.

47. For commentators who consider 1 Peter a mixed *paraenetic & consoling type letter* see Paul A. Holloway, “*Nihil inopinati accidisse*—‘Nothing unexpected has happened’: A Cyrenaic Consolatory *Topos* in 1 Peter 4:12ff,” *New Testament Studies* 48 (2002): 433–48. Jobes also considers this deserving of further study. Karen H. Jobes, *1 Peter*, BECNT (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2005), 55.

48. David W. Kendall, “The Literary and Theological Function of 1 Peter 1:3–12” in *Perspectives on First Peter*, ed. C. H. Talbert (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1986), 103–20.

know about different types of letters affect how we study, interpret, and teach the General Letters? Distinguishing a General Epistle’s type sometimes baffle interpreters, particularly when it comes to Hebrews, James, and 1 John. In fact, Hebrews,⁴⁹ James,⁵⁰ and 1 John⁵¹ appear to defy classification. Nevertheless, commentators are correct to wrestle with classifying the type represented in any given General Letter for interpretive purposes, which in turn affects the manner in which we eventually study, interpret, and teach the letters. The following chart is a modest proposal about the types of letters found among the General Letters. Nearly all exhibit mixed features of two letter types.

General Letters (45–95 CE)	Advisory or Paraenetic Letter	Commentary Letter	Consoling Letter	Encouraging Letter	Vituperative or Maligning Letter
<i>Hebrews</i> (64–70 CE)	√		√	√ (?)	

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49. Hebrews appears to have features similar to that of a consoling letter (2:16, 18; 10:32–34) followed by features of a paraenetic or advisory letter whereby the author strings together strong advice (2:1–5; 2:18; 6:2–8; 4:2–13, 17–19; 10:25–28, 35–38) and at times a seeming admonition (5:11–6:3) and exhortations that exhibit a general ethical content (2:1; 3:1, 13; 4:11, 16; 6:1, 11, 18; 10:22, 24, 32; 12:1; see 13:21). See Stowers, *Letter Writing in Greco-Roman Antiquity*, 96–97; Bateman, “Hebrews: A ‘Mixed’ Christian Letter of Exhortation,” “Words of Exhortation in Hebrews,” in *Charts on the Book of Hebrews*.
50. James appears to exhibit features similar to that of a consoling letter (2:2–11) followed by features of a paraenetic or advisory letter whereby the author strings together exhortations that exhibit a general ethical content (1:19–5:11). Donald J. Versepunt, “Genre and Story: The Community Setting of the Epistle of James,” *CBQ* 62 (2000): 96–110, esp. 102–04; Stowers, *Letter Writing in Greco-Roman Antiquity*, 96–97, 128; Martin Dibelius, *James A Commentary on the Epistle of James*, Hermeneia, ed. Heinrich Greeven, trans. Michael A. Williams (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1976), 21.
51. Although readily debated, 1 John appears to be a mixed letter as well. Whereas 1 John opens with a prologue and closes with an exhortation, the body of 1 John appears to exhibit the mixed features of commendation (2:1–2, 6, 12–14, 22, 26; 3:1–3, 21; 4:4, 14–15; 5:1, 10–13) and paraenetic or advisory letter (2:15, 24, 28; 3:18; 4:1, 7, 11; 5:21). Although Klauck argues for 1 John to be deliberative rhetoric of an advisory nature, the point of emphasis is his recognition of 1 John’s advisory features. See Hans-Josef Klauck, “Zur rhetorischen Analyse der Johannesbriefe,” *ZNW* 81 (1990): 203–24, especially 208–16. See also Stowers, *Letter Writing in Greco-Roman Antiquity*, 96.

General Letters (45–95 CE)	Advisory or Paraneitic Letter	Commendatory Letter	Consoling Letter	Encouraging Letter	Vituperative or Maligning Letter
<i>James</i> (45–50 CE)	√		√		
<i>1 Peter</i> (63–65 CE)	√		√		
<i>2 Peter</i> (64–68 CE)	√				√
<i>1 John</i> (90–95 CE)	√	√			
<i>2 John</i> (90–95 CE)	√	√			
<i>3 John</i> (90–95 CE)		√			
<i>Jude</i> (65–68 CE)	√				√

The point to be made about teaching a General Epistle is: suppose a male employee were to get a letter of recommendation from a female supervisor, few people would read and then interpret it as though it were a love letter. Similarly it would be odd to teach Jude's vituperatively styled letter during a mission's conference or pastor's ordination service centered on commending a person. Equally unsuitable, it seems to me, is to preach Peter's mixed consoling /paraneitic letter about suffering at a wedding. One further point worth observing: When raising the issue of letter length, as we did at the close of "Component Parts," the fact that all but one epistle (3 John) is a mixed typed of letter obviously contributes to these canonical letters being above the average length of a Greco-Roman letter. A

reasonable question to stop and ponder is: Who in the Greco-Roman world were aware of these fine epistolary distinctions?⁵²

TRAINED LETTER-WRITERS AND PSEUDONYMITY

The purpose of this section is to discuss the role of trained letter-writers known as amanuenses within the Greco-Roman world, and thereby offer some suggestions as to how such information benefits our studying, interpreting, and teaching of the General Letters. When studying the General Letters and Paul, it is necessary to be aware and even watchful for clues that may point us to a sender's employment of trained letter-writers. For instance, Paul provides evidence that he himself did not personally write five letters: 1 Corinthians, Galatians, Philemon, Colossians, and 2 Thessalonians. Nevertheless, he authenticates each letter bearing his name when he apparently stopped the amanuensis, provided an obvious change in handwriting, and employed an authenticating phrase "with my own hand" (τῆ ἐμῇ χειρὶ) at the end of each letter (1 Cor. 16:21; Gal. 6:11; Philem. v.19; Col. 4:18; 2 Thess. 3:17). Furthermore, Tertius wrote Romans (Rom. 16:22). Thus, six Pauline letters appear to have been written by amanuenses and five were authenticated as Paul's own letter in the closing salutation. We might ask ourselves whether such a practice is appropriate?

The Need for Trained Letter-writers

In answering both questions we must consider the time period by considering our current practice of sending email, more specifically the fact that everyone using email is capable of composing, sending, and reading emails. We alluded to this significant difference much earlier in this chapter. Unlike today in the United States, the majority of people in the ancient Greco-Roman world could not read and write. Subsequently, literacy rates were quite low. And though the lack of records hinders our ability for determining with any sense of accuracy the number of literate people,⁵³ it has been estimated that literacy rates in the Greco-Roman world were seldom more than twenty percent,⁵⁴ and

52. It is the presupposition throughout this book that these dates are in fact the best options provided by commentators. See D. A. Carson and Douglas Moo. *An Introduction to the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, second edition 1992, 2005); Donald Guthrie, *New Testament Introduction* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 4th ed. 1990); Robert G. Gramacki, *New Testament Survey* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1974).

53. Chiappetta argues that there are few accounts of Roman educational process until the 2nd century BCE. Michael Chiappetta, "Historiography and Roman Education," *History of Education Journal* 4, no. 4 (1953): 149–156.

54. The average literacy rate in the Roman Empire was 10 percent and perhaps 5 percent in the

in Judea during the first century CE the literacy rate was as low as three percent.⁵⁵ So the actual number of people who could read and write was limited. Consequently, letter-writers were distinguished as learned people, considered to perform an acknowledged professional skill, and linked with scribes throughout Greco-Roman society. Thus, public and private documents as well as public and personal letters were often dictated to amanuensis (singular). Whether one was literate or not, to employ a trained letter writer was a cultural and acceptable phenomenon. One could only imagine how professional letter-writers would benefit from the letter-writing manuals presented above. An amanuensis composed the following letters.

The first letter is an ancient sales receipt (77 CE) evident in a *reporting type letter* that affirms the sale of an eight-year old female slave unmistakably written by an amanuensis on behalf of the dispatcher.⁵⁶

LETTER'S OPENING To the agoramoni . . . from Bacche, citizen, daughter of Hermon, with her guardian Diognetus, son of Dionysius, of the Epiphanean deme.

LETTER'S BODY I swear by the Emperor Caesar Vespasianus Augustus that I have said to Heliadora, daughter of Heliadora, with her guardian who is her husband Apollonius, son of Dionysius, son of Dionysius also called Didymus, the slave Sarapous who belongs to me, and is about eight years old and without blemish apart from epilepsy and leprosy; and I swear that she is my property and is not mortgaged, and has not been alienated to other persons in any respect, and that I have received the price, 640 silver drachmae, and will guarantee the contract. If I swear truly, may it be well with me, but if false, the reverse.

western provinces. William V. Harris, *Ancient Literacy* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1989), 3–24.

55. Catherine Hezser, *Jewish Literacy in Roman Palestine*, *Texte und Studien zum Antiken Judentum* 81 (Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr, 2001), 18–26; Meir Bar-Ilan, “Illiteracy in the Land of Israel in the First Centuries C.E.” in *Essays in the Social Scientific Study of Judaism and Jewish Society*, eds. S. Fishbane, S. Schoenfeld and A. Goldschlaeger, (New York: Ktav, 1992), 46–61.
56. Catherine Hezser, *Jewish Literacy in Roman Palestine*, *Texte und Studien zum Antiken Judentum* 81 (Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr, 2001), 474; Allan Millard, *Reading and Writing in the Time of Jesus* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2000), 168; Stanley K. Stowers, *Letter Writing in Greco-roman Antiquity* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1986), 19.

LETTER'S CLOSING Signature of Diognetus on behalf of Bacche, and date.⁵⁷

Similarly a trained Jewish scribe (or an amanuensis) wrote our second letter. It is a *commanding type* letter found in one of the numerous caves surrounding Engedi where rebels sought shelter while fighting Rome. The letter concerns a verbal communication too confidential to put in writing. Thus, Elisha was expected or rather ordered to convey a message face to face, rather than by pen and ink (cf. 2 John v.12; 3 John v.13).

LETTER'S OPENING Letter of Simeon bar Kosiba, peace! To Yehonatan son of Be'aya

LETTER'S BODY [my order is] that whatever Elisha tells you do to him and help him and those with him [or: in every action].

LETTER'S CLOSING Be well.⁵⁸

Obviously, both letters share a similar structure with an opening address and greeting, the letter's body, and the letter's closing salutation. But they have other shared elements: both are written as if speaking directly to the recipient in person, one is a letter of recommendation, and the other a commanding type letter. Thus, it is clear persons other than the senders wrote the letters on behalf of their respectively named senders. Yet when studying the General Letters, particularly 1–2 Peter, James and Jude, the allegation is that someone falsely ascribed these letters to Peter, James, and Jude. This assertion is heightened when considering the fact that unlike Paul there is no authenticating phrase “with my own hand” (τῆ ἐμῆ χειρὶ) at the close of each letter. So, how do we address the issue of authenticity for the Petrine letters, James, and Jude?

Pseudonymity and the General Letters

First, we need to tackle the issue of pseudonymity during the Greco-Roman World. Often, it is stated that people of the ancient Greco-Roman world had different values when it came to literary property, and so the argument promoted is that they did not think the same way we do when it came to people falsely ascribing works to another person

57. Bernard P. Grenfell and Arthur S. Hunt, eds., *The Oxyrhynchus Papyri Part II* (London: Oxford University Press, 1899), 233–34.

58. Yigael Yadin, Bar-Kokhba: *The Rediscovery of the Legendary Hero of the Last Jewish Revolt Against Imperial Rome* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson), 126.

(pseudonymity). Thus, some commentators suggest that the Petrine letters, James, and Jude are pseudepigraphical works, but they may concede that these allegedly pseudonymous letters were not written to deceive their readers nor did they deceive the readers.⁵⁹ The ultimate implication is that they were ruled by a different set of scruples. Wilder, however, points out that both the ancient author and even Greco-Roman libraries established rules to protect literary works in order to discourage the production of pseudonymous works.⁶⁰ For instance, an author could safeguard his work in the following ways by pronouncing a curse in the document to warn others against altering the work, by binding the authorial attribution with the text by means of a seal or acrostic, by making known the document's size by citing the exact number of lines in it, by informing others of what the work contained in chronological order, and by using trusted friends to circulate his writings before they could be altered or distorted.⁶¹ In a similar way, Greeks and Romans took steps to preserve the authenticity of their library collections of classical works in the following manner: libraries were established at Alexandria and Pergamum to collect and preserve the literary writings of notable authors, forgeries of these collected works were considered offensive and punishable, and authenticity criticism was developed to

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59. Evangelicals and non-Evangelicals alike hold this view. F. W. Beare, *The First Epistle of Peter* (Oxford, England: Blackwell, 2nd ed. 1961), 29–30; Kurt Aland, “The Problem of Anonymity and Pseudonymity in Christian Literature of the First Two Centuries,” in *The Authorship and Integrity of the New Testament*, ed. Kurt Aland (London, England: SPCK, 1965), 1–13; Ralph P. Martin, *New Testament Foundations: A Guide for Christian Students*, 2 vols. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1975–1986), 2:387; James Dunn, *The Living Word* (London, England: SCM, 1987), 84; Richard Bauckham, “Pseudo-Apostolic Letters,” *JBL* 107 no. 3 (1988): 469–94, esp. 488–92. Yet Achtemeier avers, “Falsification of authorship was in fact not routinely regarded as harmless; the *Gospel of Peter* was rejected as a falsification, as was the *Acts of Paul* when the true author became known.” The former was rejected for docetic Christology and the latter for falsifying authenticity to Paul as well as for doctrinal grounds. See Achtemeier, 1 Peter, 40; Wilhelm Schneemelcher, *New Testament Apocrypha*, 2 vol., translation ed. R. McL. Wilson (Philadelphia: Westminster, vol. 1, 1963; vol. 2, 1965), 1:179; 2: 323.
60. Terry L. Wilder, *Pseudonymity, The New Testament, and Deception: An Inquiry into Intention and Reception* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 2004), 42; *idem*. “Pseudonymity and the New Testament” in *Interpreting the New Testament: Essays on Methods and Issues*, David Alan Black and David S. Dockery eds. (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2001), 296–335. Compare Bruce M. Metzger, “Literary Forgeries and Canonical Pseudepigrapha,” *JBL* 91 (1972): 3–24.
61. To protect his work, Galen, a second century Greek physician, wrote “*On His Own Books* in order to foil others from creating and selling forgeries of documents under his name.” Furthermore, Caesar Augustus (30 BCE–14 CE) has been noted to condemn people who wrote under another name (Suetonius, *The Lives of Caesars*, 2.LV). Wilder, *Pseudonymity, The New Testament, and Deception*, 42, 49. Josephus appears to protect his material by circulating drafts of his work of *War* and by identifying the number of books and the number of lines (i.e., 60,000) at the end of *Antiquities* 20.12.1§267. Compare Steve Mason, *Josephus, Judea, and Christian Origins: Methods and Categories* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2009), 57–60.

distinguish the authentic writings of famous authors from inauthentic ones.⁶² So it should not surprise us that similar concerns about falsely ascribed writings existed in the early church. For instance, a bishop of Antioch, Serapion (*ca.* 190), reveals his attitude about pseudonymity when he muses, “For our part, brethren, we receive both Peter and the other apostles as Christ, but the writings which falsely bear their names we reject, as men of experience, knowing that such were not handed down to us.”⁶³ Similarly, the Muratorian Canon avers, “There is current also (an epistle) to the Laodiceans, another to the Alexandrians, forged in Paul’s name for the sect of Marcion, and several others which cannot be received into the Catholic Church – for it will not do to mix gall with honey.”⁶⁴

Second, we must address the existence of falsely ascribed letters. While people of the Greco-Roman world and the early church shared similar concerns about pseudonymity, we must concede pseudonymous letters falsely ascribed to famous people exist. Within the Greco-Roman World, a group of thirty-five letters are ascribed to Socrates, all of which are generally considered spurious.⁶⁵ Similarly within the Church, there were spurious *Letters of Christ and Abgarus* (*ca.* 325 CE), the *Correspondence of Paul and Seneca* (*ca.* 4th century CE), and the *Epistle to the Laodiceans* (*ca.* late 3rd century CE), just to name a few. “These pseudepigraphal writings,” according to Wilder, “do not closely re-

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62. Ptolemy Philadelphus (283–246 BCE) founded the library at Alexandria, and Eumenes II (197–159 BCE) founded the library at Pergamum. These libraries also protected their literary collections. For instance, Diogenes Laertius, the Roman author of *Lives of Philosophers* (3rd century CE) reveals that Athenodoros Cordylion (or Atheneodorus), a first century BCE Stoic and keeper of the library at Pergamum, was known to cut out passages from books on Stoic philosophy if he disagreed with them (Diogenes Laertius, 7.3). When he was caught, he was punished and the writings were restored in a timely manner to their original status. Compare Wilder, *Pseudonymity, the New Testament, and Deception*, 42–43.
 63. See Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History*, 6.12.3 (trans. J. Oulton in Loeb Classical Library). Similar feelings for apostolic authority are evident in 1 Clement 42:1–2. See Wilder, *Pseudonymity, the New Testament, and Deception*, 135–39.
 64. Muratorian Canon, 63–67. Wilhelm Schneemelcher, “The History of New Testament Canon” translated by George Ogg in *New Testament Apocrypha*, vol. 1, Wilhelm Schneemelcher, ed. (Philadelphia: PA: Westminster, 1963). 44.
 65. Wilder, *Pseudonymity* 94–100. Other pseudonymous letters are ascribed to Anacharsis, a sixth-century Scythian prince; Crates and Diogenes, Cynic philosophers; and Plato, the Greek philosopher. Whereas the spurious letters of Socrates may have been written out of respect for him, many Cynic letters were written as propaganda for Cynic Philosophy. Yet, “it is not enough,” muses Guthrie concerning the disputed New Testament works like the Petrine letters, James, and Jude, “to cite the widespread secular use of the device without producing evidence to show why Christian writers should conform to not-Christian and in fact non-religious patterns in their approach to the highly significant matter of their own religious writings.” See Donald Guthrie’s reasoning in “Epistolary Pseudepigraphy” in *New Testament Introduction Revised Edition* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1990), 1017–22.

semble the disputed New Testament Letters, were written fairly late, and are not all marked with the name of an apostle as a pseudonymous letter . . .”⁶⁶ Furthermore, Jewish authors who falsely ascribed a work to another individual credited it to a person who had been dead for hundreds of years (e.g., 1 Enoch, Psalms of Solomon, etc.). As a result, no Jewish reader would mistake the work as an authentic work by the falsely ascribed named individual. Finally, Jewish pseudonymity is evident predominately in apocalyptic writings and not letters. This conclusion does not deny that some Jewish works are entitled *Letter of Aristeas*⁶⁷ or the *Letter of Jeremiah*.⁶⁸ Yet the nomenclature “letter” for these works is misleading. They are “letters” in name only and not in format. Nor do they exhibit any features common to an epistle. “The absence of any close contemporary epistolary parallels,” avers Guthrie, “must put the investigator on his guard against a too facile admittance of the practices in New Testament criticism.”⁶⁹ Although much more can be said here, space demands a conclusion.

In summary then, what have we learned about ancient letter-writers, and how does what we now know about these trained letter-writers affect how we study, interpret, and teach the General Letters? First, letter writing was a learned skill of a learned person. Second, letter writing was a time-honored profession whereby amanuenses were part of an upper-class occupation due to the high rate of illiteracy through-

66. Wilder, “Pseudonymity and the New Testament,” 301; idem, *Pseudonymity, the New Testament, and Deception*, 77. For a more detailed discussion see Wilder’s chapter four, “Responses of Early Christian Leaders to Apostolic Pseudepigrapha,” in *Pseudonymity, the New Testament, and Deception*, 123–63.

67. The *Letter of Aristeas* (ca. 2nd century BCE) is an alleged history and validation of the Septuagint text as well as an apologetic and self-defense about the Jewish people living in Egypt. In the alleged letter, Ptolemy II Philadelphus via Demetrios of Phaleron makes a request of the High Priest in Jerusalem to send translators to translate the Hebrew Bible into Greek. The High Priest sends 72 men to Alexandria and in 72 days translates the Law into Greek. Throughout the work the author presents Jewish beliefs and lifestyles as favorable and it seems to do so in an attempt to make the strict observance of the Law to be rational. See R. J. H. Shutt, “Letter of Aristeas” in *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, 2 vols., James H. Charlesworth ed. (New York: Doubleday, 1985), 1:7–34.

68. The *Letter of Jeremiah* (ca. 300 BCE) is a polemic against idolatry. The author writes a passionate and sarcastic sermon based on Jeremiah 10 that identifies idols as helpless (vv. 8–16, 57–59), useless (vv. 17–23), lifeless (vv. 24–29), powerless (vv. 30–40a, 53–56), worthless (vv. 45–52), and empty show-offs (vv. 70–73). Idol worshipers are described as foolish and shameful (vv. 40b–44). “Therefore” the author concludes, “one must not think that they are gods nor call them gods, for they are not able either to decide a case or to do good to men or women” (v. 64). “Better is the just person who has no idols” (v. 73b). See *The New Oxford Annotated Apocrypha* (Oxford: University Press, 3rd ed., 2001), 184–87; and David deSilva, *Introducing the Apocrypha: Message, Context, and Significance* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2001), 214–221, 237–43.

69. Guthrie, “Epistolary Pseudepigraphy,” 1017; Wilder, *Pseudonymity, the New Testament, and Deception*, 77.

out the Greco-Rome world. Third, the employment of trained letter-writers was a common custom in the ancient Greco-Roman world due to the high rate of illiteracy. Finally, safeguards established in the Greco-Roman world to control and minimize pseudepigraphic productions, the rejection of pseudepigraphic writings in the early church, the distancing of a person falsely ascribed work to Jewish works, and the lack of Jewish pseudepigraphic letters would appear to argue against pseudepigraphic works among the General Letters.⁷⁰ So how does what we now know about ancient letter-writers affect how we might study, interpret, and teach the General Letters?

Several presuppositions may be drawn from this section on trained letter-writers that affect our study of the General Letters. First and foremost, in light of the low rate of literacy during the first century, it is conceivable that Peter, James, and Jude may have been illiterate or at least limited in their literary abilities. Granted, Jesus was able to stand in the synagogue and read a passage from an Isaiah scroll (Luke 4:16–20), but was Jesus a learned writer? Perhaps, but we can only surmise of Peter, James, and Jude’s literary abilities.⁷¹ Second, it is plausible that Peter, James, and Jude—whether literate or not—used a professional amanuensis.⁷² Employing a skilled letter-writer was a customary practice during the first century. Furthermore, who better to communicate important church and theological matters than a person trained in the how-to of letter writing? Finally, the lack of falsely ascribed letters to a dead person among well-known Jewish Pseudepigrapha appears to support our assumption that Peter, James, and Jude are indeed the senders

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70. We must concede, however, that the evidence to resolve *definitively* the question of authorship of the Petrine Letters, James and Jude remains elusive. Conclusions presented by Evangelicals on both sides of the issue are based upon circumstantial reasoning. Metzger, “Literary Forgeries and Canonical Pseudepigrapha,” n. 67.
71. Nevertheless, many commentators argue that Peter and James, and Jude were more than capable in writing their own letters. For example, Davids, *Commentary on James*, 2–22; Jobs, *1 Peter*, 1–19; I. Howard Marshall, *1 Peter* in IVP New Testament Commentary Series (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1991), 19–24; Bo Reicke, *The Epistles of James, Peter, and Jude* AB (New York: Doubleday, 1964), 146–47; Carson and Moo, *An Introduction to the New Testament*, 641–46, 659–63, 690–92; Guthrie, *New Testament Introduction*, 762–81, 820–42, 902–05.
72. Other commentators argue that Peter, James, and Jude employed an amanuensis. For example, Dan McCartney, *James*, BECNT (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2009), 28–29; C. E. B. Cranfield, *First and Second Peter* (London, England: SCM, 1958), 7–8; Green, *Jude and 2 Peter*, 18; Carson and Moo, *An Introduction to the New Testament*, 641–46. Although Richards muses, “through Silvanus . . . I wrote briefly” (διὰ . . . δι’ ἁλίγων ἔγραψα) suggests Silvanus to be the letter carrier only, he does not exclude the possibility that he is both Peter’s amanuensis and carrier. After a lengthy discussion Randolph concludes, “academic integrity prevents me from appealing to 1 Peter 5:12 as support for the use of a secretary in 1 Peter. Silvanus certainly *could* have been the secretary.” Compare E. Randolph Richards, “Silvanus was not Peter’s Secretary: Theological Bias in Interpreting διὰ Σιλβανου . . . ἔγραψα in 1 Peter 5:12,” *JETS* 43 no. 3 (September 2000): 417–432.

of their respective letters and perhaps authored during the mid-to-late 60s. Thus, differences in style and vocabulary between 1 and 2 Peter, and the sophisticated caliber of writing skills within the Petrine Letters, James, and Jude are easily explained via an employed or perhaps even a Christian amanuensis willing to serve Jesus via the donation of his skilled writing services.

Chapter in Review

We began by stating the obvious: Hebrews, James, 1–2 Peter, 1–3 John, and Jude are all deemed canonical letters.

We then learned that ancient non-canonical Greco-Roman and Jewish letters tend to follow a threefold structure; they tend to be short; their opening salutations tend to be brief and to the point; they are purposeful in that they tend to reflect different types of letters; and it was not unusual to hire an amanuensis to compose a letter for another person.

We ended by suggesting that such knowledge affects how we go about studying, interpreting, and teaching the General Letters in the following manner.

- First, the threefold salutation of an epistle should be both recognized and respected. Although two letters, Hebrews and 1 John, do not fit the pattern of ancient letter writing, the letters written by James, Peter, John and Jude do.
- Second, the expansions evident in the opening salutations should be acknowledged for their possible contribution to the letter in that they may serve to disclose an attitude (Peter, James, and Jude) or reinforce a relationship in the hope for some sort of compliance (2 John, 3 John, and Jude).
- Third, though challenging, attempts to isolate the letter's type will prove extremely helpful in steering your study, influencing your interpretation, and focusing your teaching of the text.

Finally, the ancient custom of training and hiring amanuenses to write letters enabled us to conclude that the authors of the General Letters (e.g., Peter, James, and Jude) are indeed the senders of their respectively ascribed letters, even if an amanuenses was hired, and it will be our presuppositional stance throughout this book.