

The
Pauline Corpus
in
Early Christianity

ITS FORMATION,
PUBLICATION,
AND CIRCULATION

BENJAMIN LAIRD

Foreword by TOMAS BOKEDAL

“The formation of the Pauline letter corpus has proved to be an enduring challenge and has invited a variety of proposals. In this significant work, Ben Laird tackles the development of the Pauline letter collection as one of the major sub-corpora within the New Testament canon. His discussion of the importance—and earliness (even if not being the earliest)—of the fourteen-letter corpus, along with the roles played by the ten- and thirteen-letter corpora, recognizes the complexities involved in the development of Paul’s letter collection. The focus upon external evidence is thorough and insightful, and touches upon most of the major issues in contemporary canon studies. I highly commend this work of innovative and mature scholarship.”

—**STANLEY E. PORTER, President, Dean, and Professor of New Testament, and Roy A. Hope Chair in Christian Worldview McMaster Divinity College, Hamilton, Ontario, Canada**

“How Paul’s letters were collected seems like such a simple topic, yet it is actually quite complex. No one agrees on every point, but Ben Laird is a judicious and cautious guide, introducing all the relevant evidence, major theories, and significant players. While discussions exist that mention the key Greek manuscripts, Ben discusses all the relevant manuscripts, ancient versions, canon lists, and early witnesses. All the materials you need for this topic are systematically compiled and cogently discussed in this one volume.”

—**E. RANDOLPH RICHARDS, Research Professor of Biblical Studies, Palm Beach Atlantic University**

“Laird’s volume reflects considerable research and familiarity with the most important issues related to the formation of the corpus of Pauline writings. He carefully discusses most of the important questions and, while scholars will doubtless debate some of his positions on the Pastorals, Hebrews, and dating of the Muratorian Fragment, he nevertheless argues his positions well showing considerable familiarity with the important ancient and secondary sources. Scholars, students, and pastors will be impressed with many choice nuggets in this well-written volume.”

—**LEE MARTIN MCDONALD, President Emeritus and Professor of New Testament Studies, Acadia Divinity College, and past Dean of Theology at Acadia University, Nova Scotia**

“Laird’s work is an important contribution to a growing body of recent studies focusing on early canonical subcollections in the New Testament. Readers will find the breadth of evidence surveyed a helpful platform upon which to consider not only the early formation of the Pauline corpus (which Laird argues came in three major editions circulating simultaneously), but the formation of other canonical subcollections as well. A valuable study in early canon development.”

—**DARIAN R. LOCKETT, Professor of New Testament
Talbot School of Theology, Biola University**

“Ben Laird has produced a magnificent resource for the study of the Pauline Canon. It is a gold mine for exploring the question of origins and canonization. His research is amazingly thorough but not bloated. He handles both empirical and literary sources for the study of the canon with care and dexterity. What is more, he is judicious and fair-minded when interacting with different opinions. One does not have to agree with all his opinions to find the book a special treasure in the research of the New Testament canon. Canon scholars and those merely interested should have the book in their library.”

—**L. SCOTT KELLUM, Senior Professor of New Testament and Greek
Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary**

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HENDRICKSON
ACADEMIC

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To Margaret



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Foreword

A particularly welcome development in recent studies on the New Testament canon has been the scholarly attention directed to the canonical sub-collections. Examples of this growing body of scholarship include Martin Hengel's *The Four Gospels and the One Gospel of Jesus Christ* (Trinity Press, 2000), Stanley E. Porter's *The Pauline Canon* (Brill, 2004), and Darian R. Lockett's *Letters from the Pillar Apostles: The Formation of the Catholic Epistles as a Canonical Collection* (Pickwick Publications, 2017).

Arguably the first of the canonical sub-collections to take form and begin to circulate was the Pauline letter corpus. This should not surprise us. The earliest writings composed by the Christians were, after all, “momentary” letters addressed to churches with the addressee included in the title. The Pauline letter collection stood out as a lasting witness to the new movement and played a role in textually reshaping segments of Judaism and the Greco-Roman world as well as future societies. Northrop Frye's classic *The Great Code: The Bible and Literature* (Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1981) testifies to the thoroughgoing impact of the biblical writings on Western literature and culture, and—we may add—beyond. Along with the Gospels, Paul's Epistles have had an especially significant impact on the formation of Christian thought. His Epistle to the Romans, for example, was greatly admired by notable theologians such as Augustine, Luther, Calvin, Wesley, and Barth.

At face value, it may seem as if historical questions such as the early state of canonical collections or the exact number of books included in the *Corpus Paulinum* and other canonical subunits are of secondary importance. As scholars such as Brevard Childs underscore, the primary issue involved in the canon formation process pertains to the Bible canon's normative function. “The fundamental theological issue at stake is not the extent of the canon, which has remained in some flux within Christianity,” he asserts, “but the claim for a normative body of tradition contained in a set of books.” Childs's vivid description of the enduring significance of the canon reminds

us that the Christian canon is not a mere historical artifact, but “is the rule that delineates the area in which the church hears the word of God.”¹

Despite the significant and clear value of the Pauline Epistles for the church and their longstanding contribution to Christian thought and practice, a number of historical questions regarding the origin of this canonical collection remain. The argument may be made that the two aspects of canonicity—their normative function and historical questions relating to delimitation or canonical scope—belong closely together. Some illustrations from the early church serve to highlight this connection. The four Gospels, says Irenaeus, must be four. To the second-century Lyons bishop, the fourfold Gospel indicates universality, renewed covenant, and canonical subunit delimitation. As Irenaeus writes (*Haer.* 3.11.8):

It is not possible that the Gospels can be either more or fewer in number than they are, since there are four directions of the world in which we are, and four principal winds. . . . The four living creatures [of Rev. iv. 9] symbolize the four Gospels. . . and there were four principal covenants (καθολικαὶ διαθήκαι) made with humanity, through Noah, Abraham, Moses, and Christ.²

As indicated by the Muratorian Fragment, Irenaeus, Clement of Alexandria and others, the fourfold Gospel had been received by major portions of the church by the late second century. Thus, from early on, the symbolically significant number four became an unalterable standard linked to the ecclesial reception, production, and dissemination of the Gospels. Interestingly, Benjamin Laird’s present study, *The Pauline Corpus in Early Christianity: Its Formation, Publication, and Circulation*, presents data that help make a similar case for the Pauline Epistles, based on the number seven. With its careful attention to historical detail, Laird’s study on the emergence of the Pauline letter corpus makes a significant contribution to canon research by, among other things, placing that secondary aspect addressed by Childs (see above)—historical questions related to matters such as the extent of the canon—at the center of scholarly attention. His research on the *Corpus Paulinum*, one of the core canonical subcollections, becomes even more noteworthy when the New Testament canon is historically described—and correctly so—as a collection made up of prior collections (Gospels, Acts+Catholic Epistles, Pauline Corpus, and the Apocalypse).

1. Brevard S. Childs, *Biblical Theology in Crisis* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1970), 99.

2. Cited from Bruce M. Metzger, *The Canon of the New Testament: Its Origin, Development, and Significance* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987), 154–55.

Questions pertaining to canonicity tend to be increasingly critical for biblical scholarship. Benjamin Laird's involvement in the ongoing canon debate is twofold. In addition to serving as the co-editor, together with Stanley E. Porter, of two recent or forthcoming volumes covering a wide range of subjects related to the New Testament canon,³ this present research on the Pauline corpus in early Christianity makes a significant contribution to the study of the canonical subcollections, a currently prioritized area of scholarship. I therefore warmly recommend Laird's new book. *Tolle lege!*

Tomas Bokedal

3. Stanley E. Porter and Benjamin P. Laird, eds., *Five Views on the New Testament Canon* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2022); and Stanley E. Porter and Benjamin P. Laird, eds., *The New Testament Canon in Contemporary Research* (Leiden: Brill, forthcoming).



Acknowledgments

The initial idea for this volume took place several years ago when I was a graduate student looking into doctoral programs. Intrigued by a number of questions that relate to the origin and early reception of the New Testament writings, I began to explore potential areas of research related to the subject of canon. I considered several topics, but was eventually drawn to the formation and early canonical history of the corpus of Pauline Letters. Like many, I had long been fascinated by the life, ministry, and writings of the apostle Paul, and so it was only natural to combine my interest in Paul's writings with the study of the New Testament canon. What followed was an immensely enjoyable and fascinating study of the earliest witnesses to the Pauline letter corpus. The present volume is an expanded and revised version of my doctoral work completed at the University of Aberdeen.

I would like to express my appreciation to a small number of individuals who have made a significant contribution to this volume. I would first like to thank my *Doktorvater*, Tomas Bokedal. Always generous with his time and supportive of my work, Tomas provided numerous critiques and suggestions, and was a constant source of encouragement throughout the writing process. Our many conversations about the canon and early Christianity were stimulating and often encouraged further exploration. I am honored that he has written the foreword to this volume. I would also like to thank Peter Lampe, former professor of New Testament studies at the University of Heidelberg, for giving me the opportunity to spend a year of my doctoral studies in Heidelberg. Professor Lampe was very accommodating, and I am grateful for the rich experience of studying in the vibrant setting on Kisselgasse. Finally, I would like to express my gratitude to Stanley Porter, president of McMaster Divinity College, for serving as the external examiner of my doctoral examination and for offering valuable critiques and suggestions. As one with a deep respect and knowledge of the great tradition of New Testament studies, Stan helpfully challenged me to consider how my work might complement and build on prior scholarship. He remains a

valuable conversation partner on the subject of canon and other aspects of biblical scholarship.

In addition to those who have contributed to my academic journey, I would also like to express my gratitude to my new friends at Hendrickson. I am very appreciative of Jonathan Kline and Marco Resendes for their enthusiasm in this project and their oversight of the entire publishing process, of Kate Walker and Patricia Anders for their careful editorial attention and keen insights, of Sarah Welch for proofreading the manuscript, and of Phil Frank for completing the typesetting. It has been a delight to work with such an excellent team at Hendrickson. I would also like to thank Daniel Gurtner for preparing the indices and Sarah Slattery for the cover design. Each of these individuals have enhanced the quality and clarity of the work's presentation.

In addition to those who contributed to my time of research, writing, and the editing, I would also like to express appreciation to my colleagues and students at the Rawlings School of Divinity at Liberty University, where I have had the honor of serving since 2014. I have enjoyed and greatly benefited from numerous conversations, both inside and outside of the classroom, that relate to the subject of canon or the background of the New Testament writings. Students have a way of picking up on subjects that are of particular interest to their professors, and my students are no different. Several of them seem to have learned that if they are ready to move on from a certain topic, asking a well-placed question about the canon will often result in a swift change of subject!

Finally, I would like to thank my family for their support throughout the process and for the sacrifices they have made to afford me the opportunity to complete this study. I am greatly appreciative of my parents, Delmar and Anne Laird, who encouraged me to begin my formal theological study and who have been a constant source of encouragement along the way. Many thanks to my children—Meredith, Jonathan, Lydia, Nora, and Charles—some of whom were born before this work began and some of whom were born after! Each of them has endured many hours of their dad working on “his thesis.” Most importantly, I am grateful for the consistent support and encouragement of my wife, Margaret, who has enriched my life in countless ways and is a constant source of joy. I have fittingly dedicated this volume to her.



Abbreviations

Journals, Series, and Reference Works

AARAS	American Academy of Religion Academy Series
AB	Anchor Bible
AJEC	Ancient Judaism and Early Christianity
ANRW	<i>Aufstieg und Niedergang der römischen Welt: Geschichte und Kultur Roms im Spiegel der neueren Forschung.</i> Part 2, <i>Principat</i> . Edited by Hildegard Temporini and Wolfgang Haase. Berlin: de Gruyter, 1972–.
ANTF	Arbeiten zur neutestamentlichen Textforschung
ASE	<i>Annali di Storia dell’Esegesi</i>
AThR	<i>Anglican Theological Review</i>
BBR	<i>Bulletin of Biblical Research</i>
BECNT	Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament
BEvT	Beiträge zur evangelischen Theologie
BETL	Bibliotheca Ephemeridum Theologicarum Lovaniensium
BETS	<i>Bulletin of the Evangelical Theological Society</i>
BGBE	Beiträge zur Geschichte der biblischen Exegese
<i>Bib</i>	<i>Biblica</i>
<i>BibSac</i>	<i>Bibliotheca Sacra</i>
BN	<i>Biblische Notizen</i>
BNTC	Black’s New Testament Commentaries
BR	<i>Biblical Research</i>
BSOAS	<i>Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies</i>
BSR	<i>Bulletin for the Study of Religion</i>
BT	<i>The Bible Translator</i>
BWANT	Beiträge zur Wissenschaft vom Alten und Neuen Testament
BZNW	Beihefte zur Zeitschrift für die neutestamentliche Wissenschaft
CBQ	<i>Catholic Biblical Quarterly</i>

CBQMS	Catholic Biblical Quarterly Monograph Series
EAC	Encyclopedia of Ancient Christianity
<i>EC</i>	<i>Early Christianity</i>
ECWB	Ellicott's Commentary on the Whole Bible
EKKNT	Evangelisch-Katholischer Kommentar zum Neuen Testament
<i>ETL</i>	<i>Ephemerides Theologicae Lovanienses</i>
ExpBC	Expositor's Bible Commentary
<i>ExpTim</i>	<i>Expository Times</i>
<i>EvT</i>	<i>Evangelische Theologie</i>
<i>FM</i>	<i>Faith and Mission</i>
GOTR	Greek Orthodox Theological Review
HSCP	Harvard Studies in Classical Philology
<i>HTR</i>	<i>Harvard Theological Review</i>
HUT	Hermeneutische Untersuchungen zur Theologie
ICC	International Critical and Exegetical Commentary
<i>ITQ</i>	<i>Irish Theological Quarterly</i>
<i>JBL</i>	<i>Journal of Biblical Literature</i>
<i>JEarCS</i>	<i>Journal of Eastern Christian Studies</i>
<i>J ECS</i>	<i>Journal of Early Christian Studies</i>
<i>JETS</i>	<i>Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society</i>
<i>JGRChJ</i>	<i>Journal of Greco-Roman Christianity and Judaism</i>
<i>JRS</i>	<i>The Journal of Roman Studies</i>
<i>JSNT</i>	<i>Journal for the Study of the New Testament</i>
JSNTSup	Journal for the Study of the New Testament Supplement Series
<i>JSPL</i>	<i>Journal for the Study of Paul and His Letters</i>
<i>JTS</i>	<i>Journal of Theological Studies</i>
LBS	Linguistic Biblical Studies
LEC	Library of Early Christianity
LNTS	Library of New Testament Studies
LPS	Library of Pauline Studies
<i>MR</i>	<i>Methodist Review</i>
NACSBT	New American Commentary Studies in Bible and Theology
NIBCNT	New International Bible Commentary of the New Testament
NICNT	New International Commentary on the New Testament
NICOT	New International Commentary on the Old Testament

NIGTC	New International Greek Testament Commentary
NKZ	<i>Neue kirchliche Zeitschrift</i>
NovT	<i>Novum Testamentum</i>
NovTSup	Supplements to Novum Testamentum
NTAbh	Neutestamentliche Abhandlungen
NTOA	Novum Testamentum et Orbis Antiquus
NTS	<i>New Testament Studies</i>
NTTh	New Testament Theology
NTTSD	New Testament Tools, Studies, and Documents
OEBB	The Oxford Encyclopedia of the Books of the Bible
PAST	Pauline Studies
PFES	Publications on the Finnish Exegetical Society
PG	Patrologia Graeca
PNTC	Pillar New Testament Commentary
PPSD	Pauline and Patristic Scholars in Debate
RB	<i>Revue biblique</i>
RBén	<i>Revue bénédictine</i>
ResQ	<i>Restoration Quarterly</i>
RevExp	<i>Review and Expositor</i>
RevScRel	<i>Revue des sciences religieuses</i>
SBR	Studies of the Bible and Its Reception
SD	Studies and Documents
SecCent	<i>Second Century</i>
SHAW	Sitzungsberichte der heidelberger Akademie der Wissenschaften
SHT	Studia Humaniora Tartuensia
SNTSMS	Society for New Testament Studies Monograph Series
SP	Sacra Pagina
SSEJC	Studies in Scripture in Early Judaism and Christianity
STAC	Studien und Texte zu Antike und Christentum
SBLStBL	Society of Biblical Literature Studies in Biblical Literature
StPatr	Studia Patristica
StSin	Studia Sinaitica
SwJT	Southwestern Journal of Theology
TENTS	Texts and Editions for New Testament Study
TLZ	<i>Theologische Literaturzeitung</i>
TNTC	Tyndale New Testament Commentaries
TRE	<i>Theologische Realenzyklopädie</i>
TS	Texts and Studies

TU	Texte und Untersuchungen
VC	<i>Vigiliae Christianae</i>
VCSup	Supplements to <i>Vigiliae Christianae</i>
VE	<i>Vox Evangelica</i>
VL	Vetus Latina: Die Reste der altlateinischen Bibel
WBC	Word Biblical Commentary
WTJ	<i>Westminster Theological Journal</i>
WUNT	Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen zum Neuen Testament
WZ	<i>Wissenschaftliche Zeitschrift</i>
ZA	<i>Zeitschrift für Assyriologie</i>
ZAC	<i>Zeitschrift für Antikes Christentum</i>
ZBK	Zürcher Bibelkommentare
ZECNT	Zondervan Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament
ZKG	<i>Zeitschrift für Kirchengeschichte</i>
ZNW	<i>Zeitschrift für die neutestamentliche Wissenschaft und die Kunde der älteren Kirche</i>
ZST	<i>Zeitschrift für systematische Theologie</i>
ZTK	<i>Zeitschrift für Theologie und Kirche</i>

Ancient Sources

Apostolic Fathers and Early Christian

<i>Barn.</i>	<i>Barnabas</i>
<i>Diogn.</i>	<i>Diognetus</i>
<i>Herm. Mand.</i>	Shepherd of Hermas, <i>Mandates</i>
AMBROSE	
<i>Abr.</i>	<i>De Abraham (On Abraham)</i>
<i>Paen.</i>	<i>De paenitentia (On Repentance)</i>
ARISTIDES	
<i>Apol.</i>	<i>Apology</i>
ATHANASIUS	
<i>Inc.</i>	<i>De incarnatione (On the Incarnation)</i>
AUGUSTINE OF HIPPO	
<i>Civ.</i>	<i>De civitate Dei (The City of God)</i>
<i>Doctr. chr.</i>	<i>De doctrina christiana (Christian Instruction)</i>
<i>Pecc. merit.</i>	<i>De peccatorum meritis et remissione (Guilt and Remission of Sins)</i>

CLEMENT OF ROME

1 Clem. *1 Clement*

CYPRIAN

Cyp. Ep. *Epistulae (Letters)*

CYRIL OF JERUSALEM

Cyr. Lec. *Lectures*

EPIPHANIUS

Pan. *Panarion (Refutation of all Heresies)*

EUSEBIUS

Hist. eccl. *Historia ecclesiastica (Ecclesiastical History)*

IGNATIUS OF ANTIOCH

Ign. Eph. *To the Ephesians*

Ign. Magn. *To the Magnesians*

Ign. Phld. *To the Philadelphians*

Ign. Rom. *To the Romans*

IRENÆUS

Haer. *Adversus haereses (Against Heresies)*

JEROME

Epist. *Epistulae*

Vir. ill. *De viris illustribus (Lives of Illustrious Men)*

JUSTIN MARTYR

Dial. *Dialogus cum Tryphone (Dialogue with Trypho)*

ORIGEN

Cels. *Contra Celsus (Against Celsus)*

Hom. Josh. *Homilies on Joshua*

Princ. *De principiis (First Principles)*

PHOTIUS

Cod. *Bibliotheca (Library)*

POLYCARP OF SMYRNA

Pol. Phil. *To the Philippians*

RUFINUS

Symb. *Commentarius in symbolum apostolorum*

TERTULLIAN

Marc. *Adversus Marcionem (Against Marcion)*

Praescr. *De praescriptione haereticorum (Prescription against Heretics)*

Pud. *De pudicitia (On Modesty)*

Res. *De resurrectione carnis (The Resurrection of the Flesh)*

THEOPHILUS

Autol. *Ad Autolyicum (To Autolyicus)*

Greco-Roman

CICERO

Att. *Epistulae ad Atticum (Letters to Atticus)*

Fam. *Epistulae ad familiares (Letters to Friends)*

JOSEPHUS

Ant. *Jewish Antiquities*

PLINY THE YOUNGER

Ep. *Epistulae*

PLUTARCH

Eum. *Eumenes*

SENECA THE YOUNGER

Ep. Paul Sen. *Epistles of Paul and Seneca*

TACITUS

Ann. *Annales (Annals)*



Introduction

Like many of his contemporaries, the apostle Paul's preferred method of communication was personal, face-to-face interaction rather than written correspondence dispatched from a distant location.¹ It was in the context of personal interaction that one's sincerity and passion could be most fully expressed, while also allowing for dialogue. As a pair of New Testament scholars have explained, "In the ancient world, as today, a letter served as a substitute for the personal presence of the writer with the reader. It was a substitute for oral, face-to-face communication. In the early church, when an apostle or another leader was not able to address a congregation in person he wrote a letter."² Paul seems to have maintained this approach throughout his many years of missionary activity. While written correspondence was often a necessary means of exchanging information and providing Christian communities with needed instruction and encouragement, passing remarks throughout his writings reveal that he much preferred personal interaction. As William Doty has observed, Paul's writings "were at best a makeshift substitute for [his] presence with the addressees." Given the choice, "Paul would rather have conveyed his information in person than in letters."³ One clear example of this appears in Rom 1:9–15. To those who were part of the local churches in the distant Roman capital, Paul emphasizes

1. According to M. Luther Stirewalt, *Paul, the Letter Writer* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003), 117, Paul's preference for personal instruction and interaction was especially apparent in his earlier letters. Later in Paul's ministry, however, Stirewalt concludes, "Paul had learned to depend on letters not simply because the separation could not be conveniently bridged, but also because on occasion it proved to be a preferable means of meeting the problems and needs of the assemblies."

2. Darrell L. Bock and Buist M. Fanning, eds., *Interpreting the New Testament Text: Introduction to the Art and Science of Exegesis* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2006), 226.

3. William Doty, *Letters in Primitive Christianity* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1973), 44.

his desire to be in their presence,⁴ noting that he has often prayed that God would grant him this request. In one of his Epistles to the Thessalonians, he even states that he has been torn away from them, using the rather strong verb ἀπορφανίζω to describe this separation (1 Thess 2:17).⁵ Similarly, Paul describes the Philippian believers as ἀδελφοί μου ἀγαπητοὶ καὶ ἐπιπόθητοι, “my beloved and much longed for brothers (Phil 4:1).”

Paul’s preference for personal interaction may also be observed in the book of Acts. In several of the narratives recounting Paul’s travels, Luke describes him as actively engaged in preaching and teaching in local synagogues and other locations, such as the School of Tyrannus in Ephesus. In fact, the value Paul placed on personal interaction with those he regarded as partners in his faith often compelled him to embark on new journeys or to alter his immediate plans. Following the Jerusalem Council, for example, Paul is said to have expressed a desire to revisit the recently established churches in Asia Minor in order to evaluate their spiritual progress and well-being (Acts 15:36).

Given the extent to which Paul often visited Christian communities throughout the Mediterranean world, references in his writings to the affection he had for those in remote locations should be understood not as a mere rhetorical measure, but as tangible evidence for his predilection for personal interaction and oral instruction. Written correspondence appears to have taken place only when his immediate circumstances precluded his ability to be physically present in a given location. Such an understanding is consistent with Polycarp’s reminder to the church in Philippi: “When he [Paul] was among you in the presence of the men of that time, [he] accurately and reliably taught the word concerning the truth. And when he was absent he wrote you letters.”⁶ Frequent imprisonment, pressing concerns in

4. Paul uses the compound verb ἐπιποθέω in Rom 1:11 to express his intense desire to visit those in Rome. The prepositional prefix ἐπι intensifies the verb ποθέω and is thus used to express a strong desire or craving for something (e.g., a newborn’s craving for milk, as noted in 1 Pet 2:2). The same verb is used in 1 Thess 3:6 to express the Thessalonians’ desire to be with Paul and his companions and in 2 Tim 1:4 to describe Paul’s desire to be reunited with Timothy.

5. Outside of the New Testament, the verb ἀπορφανίζω was sometimes used to describe the act of making or leaving an individual orphaned. In this context, of course, Paul uses the term in a figurative sense to describe his painful separation from those in Thessalonica.

6. Pol. *Phil.* 3.2. Cited from Michael W. Holmes, ed., *The Apostolic Fathers: Greek Texts and English Translations*, 3rd ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 1999), 209.

the newly founded Christian communities, and the time-consuming task of traveling often made it impractical or even impossible for Paul to meet personally with each community of believers or his associates. In these instances, Paul had little choice but to content himself with written communication, though this would have often entailed a measure of regret.

In light of Paul's preference for personal interaction, it is somewhat surprising, and perhaps even a bit ironic, that he is largely known today because of the surviving collection of writings that bear his name. Throughout the centuries, the epistles attributed to Paul have been cherished and recognized as an integral portion of the New Testament canon, serving as a continual source of study, meditation, discussion, and debate. As Harry Gamble observes, "Not only were Paul's letters, so far as we know, the earliest Christian writings, they were also the earliest to be valued, imitated, to circulate beyond their original recipients, and to be collected."⁷ Many scholars would even go so far as to conclude that the establishment of Christianity as a distinct faith was the direct result of Paul's influence. F. C. Baur, for example, states quite emphatically that "Christianity, in its universal historical acceptance, was the work of the Apostle Paul."⁸ Although many would contend that Baur's assessment was ill-founded or overstated, Udo Schnelle may very well be justified in concluding that Paul was "the decisive representative of the formation of early Christianity as an independent movement."⁹ In view of the foundational role that the Pauline writings have played in the formation of Christian theology and the history of Christianity, the scholarly attention Paul's writings have received over the centuries should come as little surprise. Relatively little of this scholarly attention, however, has focused specifically on the early formation of the Pauline letter corpus, and it is apparent that additional investigation and reflection is needed.¹⁰

7. Harry Y. Gamble, *Books and Readers in the Early Church* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995), 58.

8. F. C. Baur, *Paul the Apostle of Jesus Christ: The Life and Works of the Apostle Paul* (repr., Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2003), 3. Original publication: *Paulus, der Apostel Jesu Christi: Sein Leben und Wirken, seine Briefe und seine Lehre* (Stuttgart: Becher & Müller, 1845).

9. Udo Schnelle, *Apostle Paul: His Life and Theology*, trans. M. Eugene Boring (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2005), 169.

10. Some of the more significant works discussing the formation of the Pauline corpus that have appeared over the last century are Eugene Harrison Lovering, "The Collection, Redaction, and Early Circulation of the Corpus Paulinum" (PhD diss., Southern Methodist University, 1988); Stanley E. Porter, ed., *The Pauline Canon*,

Overview of the Volume

Our objective in this volume will be to ascertain, so far as possible, what may be determined regarding the early formation and canonical development of the Pauline corpus. How might we explain how a number of writings associated with Paul—writings produced at different times and in different locations—eventually came to form a single literary collection recognized by Christians throughout the Roman world? It will quickly become apparent that no single piece of evidence can provide a full picture of this story or answer all of our questions regarding the process of the collection's formation. Although the extant witnesses are suggestive in many respects, they are certainly not conclusive. In an effort therefore to provide a fresh assessment of the origin and canonical development of the collection, I will consider a large body of internal and external evidence which together supports the conclusion that at least three major archetypal editions of the corpus—those containing ten, thirteen, and fourteen letters—were formed and designed as early as the first century and certainly no later than the mid-second century. It will further be suggested that these major archetypal editions circulated simultaneously for many years until collections containing fourteen writings became widely recognized no later than the fourth century. Although it is unlikely that the most primitive edition of the Pauline corpus contained all fourteen of the writings traditionally associated with Paul, it will be suggested that each of the fourteen writings originated either with Paul or with those who were members of the early Pauline circle, and that many of these writings were likely composed much earlier than is often assumed in modern scholarship. I will further suggest that some of Paul's companions may have played a significant role in the initial creation and development of the corpus and may have played a part in the production of subsequent editions that contained the Pastoral Epistles and, in some cases, Hebrews. Before

PAST 1 (Leiden: Brill, 2001); David Trobisch, "Die Entstehung der Paulusbriefsammlung: Studien zu den Anfängen christlicher Publizistik" (PhD diss., University of Göttingen, 1989); Trobisch, *Paul's Letter Collection: Tracing the Origins* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1994); C. Leslie Mitton, *The Formation of the Pauline Corpus of Letters* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2009); Jerome Murphy-O'Connor, *Paul the Letter Writer* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1995); Theodor Zahn, *Geschichte des neutestamentlichen Kanons*, 2 vols. (Erlangen: Deichert, 1888–89); Timothy Sailors, "The Collection of the Corpus Paulinum: The Status Quaestionis," *Proceedings of EGL & MWBS* 17 (1997): 115–28; Lewis Foster, "The Earliest Collection of Paul's Epistles," *BETS* 10 (1967): 44–55. In addition to these sources, many general works on the canon include a brief treatment of the Pauline letter corpus.

we begin our study, it will be helpful to provide a brief chapter-by-chapter overview of the content of this volume.

Chapter 1: First-Century Literary Conventions and the Composition of the Pauline Corpus

This chapter begins with a brief treatment of various aspects of first-century letter writing that inform our understanding of how the individual Pauline writings were likely produced, assembled, and distributed. Several recent studies have significantly advanced our knowledge of the role of ancient secretaries and letter carriers, as well as the manner in which ancient literary collections were assembled, edited, and later redacted. Chapter 1 considers the possibility that Paul, like many of his contemporaries, often collaborated with secretaries, and that these secretaries often produced one or more duplicate copies of his works. As this chapter demonstrates, the likelihood that duplicate copies of Paul's writings were produced at the time of composition provides notable insight relating to the manner in which the initial collection of his epistles was originally assembled. Most importantly, this observation strongly suggests that Paul's writings would have originally been assembled from the manuscripts in his possession, or perhaps of those in the possession of his close associates. In addition to the role that secretaries played in the composition of ancient writings, the chapter evaluates some of the common means of authenticating ancient writings and provides background relating to the formation, redaction, and circulation of various literary collections from the ancient Greco-Roman world.

Chapter 2: Textual Witnesses to the Early State of the Pauline Corpus

The second chapter closely examines five unique types of textual witnesses to the Pauline corpus for evidence relating to the early state of the collection. The first section considers what the earliest and most relevant extant Greek witnesses may reveal about the early canonical development of the Pauline corpus.¹¹ Although many of the earliest Greek witnesses to

11. Notable secondary sources that provide significant insight regarding the Greek witnesses include James R. Royse, "The Early Text of Paul (and Hebrews)," in *The Early Text of the New Testament*, ed. Charles E. Hill and Michael J. Kruger (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 175–203; Dirk Jongkind, "The Text of the Pauline Corpus," in *The Blackwell Companion to Paul*, ed. Stephen Westerholm

the Pauline Epistles are fragmentary and provide little insight regarding canonical matters, several of the surviving textual witnesses provide valuable information regarding which writings circulated as part of the Pauline corpus in the centuries following its initial formation and how the material in these collections was arranged. This section demonstrates that the majority of the Greek manuscripts that circulated during the first several centuries of the Christian era likely contained fourteen epistles, although there are a number of indications that editions containing ten or thirteen letters also circulated during this time.

Second, the chapter also discusses the rise of the codex and considers why it may have been quickly embraced in Christian communities. Because of the fact that a sizeable majority of the earliest manuscripts containing the Pauline Epistles appear in codex form, it will be helpful to account for how the use of the codex may have influenced how Paul's writings circulated and what this development may reveal about the early state of the Pauline letter collection.

Third, after exploring several extant Greek manuscripts and the early rise of the codex, the origin and use of the titles of the individual writings are examined. The nearly universal presence and uniformity of these titles in the extant Greek witnesses strongly implies that they were created very early, possibly by one or more of Paul's associates who played a leading role in the early development or circulation of the collection.

Fourth, this chapter considers what early textual witnesses to several of the more significant ancient translations of the Greek New Testament may reveal about the early state of the Pauline corpus. These witnesses are particularly helpful for what they indicate about the early transmission and circulation of the Pauline corpus in various geographical locations. This section analyzes the content and arrangement of the Pauline Letters in the key Latin, Syriac, and Coptic witnesses, as well as certain features of these textual traditions that provide insight relating to the canonical state of the corpus in various geographical settings during the early centuries of the Christian movement.

Finally, the chapter concludes with an examination of early textual witnesses that identify or enumerate a set list of authoritative Christian writings. The various sources considered are diverse in nature and include

(Chichester, UK: Wiley Blackwell, 2011), 216–31; and Brent Nongbri, "Pauline Letter Manuscripts," in *All Things to All Cultures: Paul among Jews, Greeks, and Romans*, ed. Mark Harding and Alanna Nobbs (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2013), 84–102.

testimony from individuals such as Marcion, Origen, Eusebius, and Athanasius, manuscripts such as the Muratorian Fragment, and the resolutions of various church councils such as the councils which convened in Carthage in both 397 CE and 419 CE.

Chapter 3: Witness to the Early State of the Pauline Corpus in Ancient Writers

Chapter 3 analyzes a diverse assortment of writings composed between the late-first through the early-fifth centuries. The analysis of these writings aims to ascertain the degree to which ancient writers were familiar with Paul's Epistles and what they understood about the circumstances surrounding their composition and their early reception. The chapter begins with a treatment of two notable passages contained within the Pauline corpus: one that speaks to the intended use of an epistle (1 Thess 5:27), and another that refers to an exchange of writings (Col 4:16). In addition to these two passages, the chapter also considers what 2 Pet 3:15–16, the only non-Pauline reference to a collection of Paul's letters that appears in the biblical canon, may imply about the early reception or at least the early state of the corpus.

A large portion of the chapter surveys a substantial body of patristic literature and the testimony of other ancient writers from the late first through the early fifth centuries. Special attention is given to what these authors may reveal about the state of the Pauline corpus and the early reception of the individual writings in various times and locations. One of the more notable writers addressed in this chapter is Marcion, the controversial second-century leader who is often thought to have played a significant role in provoking the leadership of the greater church to establish, or at least to recognize, a collection of canonical writings. The leaders of the orthodox movement, it has been suggested, were forced to recognize a particular body of writings in order to avoid the embarrassment and complications that would inevitably result from a widely recognized heretic taking the leading role in establishing a canonical collection. Not all scholars are convinced by this viewpoint, however, with some suggesting that he simply inherited an existing corpus of the Pauline writings and that he was not responsible for substantially altering this collection or prompting the process of canonization. As a response to the controversy that continues to surround this enigmatic figure, this chapter aims to address what we know of the origin of Marcion's *Apostolikon* and what role Marcion may have played in the canonical development of the Pauline corpus.

Chapter 4: The Canonical Reception of the Pastoral Epistles and Hebrews

A significant challenge related to the study of the writings associated with the apostle Paul is that a number of contemporary scholars deem several of these works to be inauthentic and the product of subsequent generations. There is particular skepticism towards the authenticity of Ephesians, Colossians, 2 Thessalonians, and the Pastoral Epistles especially. Scholars also overwhelmingly reject the possibility that Paul was the author of the formally anonymous writing known as Hebrews. These historical perceptions simply cannot be separated from one's view of the canonical formation of the corpus. If these works cannot be attributed to Paul, then it would be difficult to maintain a theory that assumes their presence in one or more early collections. One is destined to conclude that the formation of the corpus took place over many years as new material continued to be added.

When assessing the question of authorship, it is not uncommon for scholars to limit their attention largely on the internal evidence. In recent centuries, significant attention has been given to what the language and theological perspectives of the biblical writings may reveal about their historical background (e.g., their authorship and dating), with considerably less attention given to early witnesses that provide insight related to their early reception. That being the case, this chapter evaluates the external evidence relating to the Pastoral Epistles and Hebrews, writings with a more tumultuous reception in early Christianity, in order to assess their origin and canonical relationship to early editions of the Pauline corpus.

Chapter 5: An Assessment of Scholarly Theories Pertaining to the Formation of the Pauline Corpus

The fifth chapter surveys the most influential scholarly theories that provide an explanation for the initial formation and canonical development of the Pauline corpus. In addition to a description of each major theory, the chapter offers an assessment of how each theory accounts for the evidence presented throughout this volume. For the sake of convenience, this chapter organizes the various theories into four broad categories.

The first general theory includes those based on the assumption that the Pauline corpus developed after a lengthy period of neglect or very limited circulation—a perspective held by early twentieth-century scholars such as Edgar Goodspeed, John Knox, and C. Leslie Mitton. The second theory holds

that the development of the corpus was a gradual development that took place over many decades as new writings were produced and as the epistles became more widely known. While many scholars assume that its development was a gradual, multiphased process, some have emphasized that the interchange of epistles between Christian communities in the first and second centuries was the major catalyst for the initial formation of a corpus, and that the corpus continued to expand for many years until editions containing fourteen epistles became widely recognized. This section treats the work of scholars such as Lucetta Mowry, Jerome Murphy-O'Connor, Eugene Lovering, Günter Zuntz, Theodor Zahn, and Brevard Childs. The third basic theory holds that the earliest edition(s) of the Pauline corpus was largely the work and creation of a particular Pauline school—a theory promoted by scholars such as Walter Schmithals and Harry Gamble. Finally, the chapter concludes with a treatment of scholars such as David Trobisch, Lewis Foster, and E. Randolph Richards, who suggest that the corpus began to circulate shortly before or after Paul's death and that the initial collection of the corpus was organized by Paul himself or by those who were part of his inner network.

Chapter 6: The Formation of the Pauline Letter Corpus on the Basis of the Extant Evidence

Building upon the evidence and subjects explored throughout this volume, the final chapter presents a fresh overview of the formation, publication, and circulation of the Pauline corpus. In addition to considering the circumstances that may have initially prompted the development of the Pauline writings, this chapter identifies the earliest editions of the Pauline corpus and accounts for their development and historical relationship to one another. Unlike theories proposed in recent decades, which tend to depend heavily on one type of evidence, the theory proposed in this chapter accounts for a variety of evidence—both internal and external—in order to ascertain the most probable set of circumstances that ultimately led to the corpus's formation and early circulation. While it should go without saying that full certainty cannot be achieved, the evidence presented in this volume is offered with the objective of providing greater clarity and certainty related to the origins of the Pauline letter corpus. As stated above, the primary argument defended in this study is that at least three major archetypal editions of the corpus began to circulate as early as the first century or soon thereafter, each of which circulated for several decades until a fourteen-volume edition became widely recognized by the fourth century.

Challenges Related to the Study of the Formation of the Pauline Corpus

Accounting for the early canonical history of the Pauline writings is admittedly a formidable and challenging task. As Stanley Porter rightly observes, “There is no entirely satisfactory theory as to the origins of the Pauline letter collection,” and “critical scholarship at this point cannot agree on a convincing explanation of how it is that the Pauline letter collection emerged.”¹² Similarly, Harry Gamble concludes that “the evidence for the history of the Pauline corpus is so complex and multifaceted that no single theory seems capable of accounting for it all.”¹³

The primary difficulty in accounting for the emergence of the Pauline corpus, of course, is that the extant historical evidence from the first and second centuries is sparse and often inconclusive. Questions such as the identity of the early editor(s), the location from which the original editions were formed, and even the content and arrangement of the earliest editions of the corpus are difficult to assess on the basis of the limited historical evidence that has survived. No testimony regarding the origin of the corpus has survived from early writers, which would provide a firsthand account of its early formation. And it is not only the specific events and circumstances that prompted the formation that are difficult to determine. Much of the extant evidence—including testimony from ancient writers and the available Greek witnesses—indicates that for many centuries there was a considerable degree of divergence with respect to the content and arrangement of the material contained in the corpus. As B. F. Westcott observes, it is often difficult to make definitive conclusions regarding the reception of ancient works, given the casual manner in which early writers often interacted with existing literature. According to Westcott, “the first Christian writers . . . did not always shew individually the caution and judgment of the Church. They quote ecclesiastical books from time to time as if they were canonical: the analogy of the faith was to them a sufficient warrant for their immediate use.” This fairly uncritical use of Christian sources, Westcott explains, ultimately gave way to more discerning and precise language regarding the status of individual writings. “As soon however as a practical interest at-

12. Stanley E. Porter, “When and How was the Pauline Canon Compiled? An Assessment of Theories,” in *The Pauline Canon*, 121.

13. Harry Y. Gamble, “The New Testament Canon: Recent Research and the Status Quaestionis,” in *The Canon Debate*, ed. Lee Martin McDonald and James A. Sanders (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2002), 286.

tached to the question of the Canon [became more prominent] their judgment was clear and unanimous.”¹⁴ It is not as though the early writers did not elevate some writing over others or that they did not maintain a concept of Scripture. Rather, they often tended to refer to Christian writings for practical reasons and did not consistently use language that would indicate precisely how the writings were perceived.

In response to the inconclusive nature of the available evidence relating to both the initial formation and subsequent reception of the Pauline corpus, E. Randolph Richards rightly concludes that “all theories dealing with the collection of the Pauline Corpus, by virtue of the evidence, speak in terms of probabilities” and that “the question is always which reconstruction best fits the historical situation.”¹⁵ While the challenges related to this study are certainly formidable, they are not of such magnitude that we cannot reasonably achieve a plausible theory concerning the basic framework of the formation of the Pauline letter collection.

Contributions to New Testament Scholarship

Although many attempts have been made to address questions relating to the origins of the Pauline letter corpus, much work remains. As Porter observes, the entire process of the formation and canonization of the Pauline Letters “remains an underexplored area in Pauline scholarship.”¹⁶ In order to address this somewhat uncharted subject, this volume explores the available evidence and offers what may be the most comprehensive examination of the origin and circulation of the Pauline Letters produced in recent scholarship. The theory presented in this volume challenges the common perception that the formation of the Pauline corpus as a discrete collection of canonical writings took many decades or even centuries to develop. Based on the wide body of evidence evaluated throughout the volume, it is argued that each of the three primary editions of the corpus—editions that were not markedly different but distinguished only by the number of writings—

14. Brooke F. Westcott, *A General Survey of the History of the Canon of the New Testament*, 6th ed. (London: Macmillan, 1889), 10.

15. E. Randolph Richards, *Paul and First-Century Letter Writing: Secretaries, Composition and Collection* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2004), 218.

16. Stanley E. Porter, “Paul and the Process of Canonization,” in *Exploring the Origins of the Bible*, ed. Craig A. Evans and Emanuel Tov (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2008), 174.

circulated simultaneously for several centuries. The most primitive edition of the corpus appears to have been a ten-volume body of writings that did not contain the Pastoral Epistles and Hebrews. A relatively short time after this edition began to circulate, expanded editions soon developed, such as thirteen-volume editions that contained the Pastorals and fourteen-volume editions that included both the Pastorals and Hebrews. These three editions may not have been produced entirely independent of one another, and at least two of the editions may have even shared a common editor—or, in the very least, were produced in a common literary environment. These three primary editions appear to have emerged within a relatively narrow period of time rather than over a period of several decades or even centuries, as is often assumed. The relationship of these three primary archetypal editions of the Pauline corpus to one another has received only minimal scholarly attention and will thus be carefully considered.

Several corollary subjects relating to the primary thesis of this work will also be introduced. For example, the volume examines the significance of the early tradition that Paul wrote to seven churches. Evidence for this tradition may be found in witnesses such as the Muratorian Fragment as well as in the writings of Cyprian, Victorinus of Pettau, Jerome, and Amphilochius of Iconium. The so-called Marcionite Prologues may also provide further evidence for this tradition. So influential was the seven-church tradition that several early corpora of literary texts—such as the Catholic Epistles, the letters of Revelation, and the letters of Ignatius—may have been influenced by the appeal of a corpus of letters written to seven unique audiences. While the understanding that Paul wrote to seven churches was widely known in the early church, the role that this tradition played in the reception and early circulation of the Pauline writings has received only limited attention. The various witnesses to this tradition are thus analyzed, and consideration is given to the manner in which each of the three major archetypal editions of the corpus were thought to be consistent with it.

The evidence analyzed in this volume will also have significant implications for the study of the background of several New Testament writings, particularly those in which Pauline authorship is disputed. As noted above, many scholars conclude that the collection of writings traditionally attributed to Paul contains several epistles that were written long after his lifetime by either his colleagues or other unknown individuals. This consensus directly relates to common assumptions pertaining to the canonical development of the corpus. Naturally, those who reject the authenticity of certain writings must begin with the assumption that the corpus expanded over time

and included an eclectic selection of works with varying degrees of Pauline influence. Rejecting the authenticity of several of the epistles traditionally ascribed to Paul was made popular several generations ago by scholars such as F. C. Baur, who contended that Paul's genuine letters—what he describes as the *Hauptbriefe*—were limited to Romans, 1 and 2 Corinthians, and Galatians, and that the remaining epistles should be regarded as inauthentic.¹⁷ Baur's influence has been undeniably significant in New Testament studies. As Stephen Neill and N. T. Wright observe, "A century after his death Baur still walks abroad, and echoes of his ideas are found in all kinds of places."¹⁸

Certainly, much is at stake in our ability to accurately discern which letters of the Pauline corpus are authentic, and in the case of Hebrews, the extent to which it was influenced by Pauline thought or connected historically to the apostle Paul. Whether considering Paul's letters in relation to first-century Judaism, his understanding of the doctrine of justification, his perspective on church polity, his understanding of the events that will transpire during the last days, or any number of studies relating to the background or theological outlook of his writings, one must first carefully determine the place of the individual letters within the Pauline tradition. Just as an art historian would need to determine which paintings attributed to an artist such as Johannes Vermeer are authentic before making judgments about his style and technique, so too must biblical scholars carefully establish the body of authentic writings of Paul before seeking to articulate his perspective on a given topic.¹⁹

With respect to the subject of authorship, it is not uncommon for biblical scholars to uncritically adopt the conclusions passed down from previous generations or to assume that questions relating to authorship can simply be determined from internal evidence, such as an epistle's literary style or its treatment of theological subjects. Although the purpose of this

17. J. C. O'Neil, *The Recovery of Paul's Letter to the Galatians* (London: SPCK, 1972), 3.

18. Stephen Neill and N. T. Wright, *The Interpretation of the New Testament 1861–1986*, rev. ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988), 62.

19. An example of this may be seen in contemporary discussions relating to Paul's soteriology. While much of contemporary discussion relating to Paul's understanding of justification, the role of works and other related topics largely center up key texts in Romans, Galatians, and other epistles universally recognized as authentic, Robert J. Cara recently challenged many of the conclusions of the New Perspective on Paul, in large part because of the significance he places on passages in writings such as Ephesians, Titus, and 2 Timothy. Robert J. Cara, *Cracking the Foundation of the New Perspective on Paul* (Fearn, UK: Mentor, 2017).

volume is not to settle the debates regarding the authenticity of certain writings *per se*, the information presented will enable scholars to develop a more historically informed perspective on the question of the authorship of the Pastoral Epistles and Hebrews, and to a lesser extent, the disputed writings of Ephesians, Colossians, and 2 Thessalonians.

With respect to the Epistle to the Hebrews, scholars have struggled for centuries to reconcile several of the peculiarities of the epistle that seem to preclude Pauline authorship with the close association of the epistle in early Christianity to the Pauline letter corpus. Indeed, a study of the church fathers reveals that the Pauline authorship of Hebrews was questioned very early, yet it is also apparent that the close association between Hebrews with the Pauline corpus was not a late development. The earliest and most reliable textual witnesses and evidence from the church fathers indicate that Hebrews did in fact circulate as a Pauline epistle from a remarkably early period and that its canonical recognition was based primarily on its close association with Paul.

In addition to the treatment of the early reception of Hebrews, this volume considers internal evidence such as the postscript and other features of the text. Attention is given to the viewpoint of scholars such as William Wrede and Gert Steyn, who proposes that the postscript was composed at some time subsequent to the original publication of the epistle in order to enhance the Pauline character of the writing; and of Clare Rothschild, who has suggested that the postscript is original to the epistle but that it was produced by an unknown author who intentionally crafted it in such a way so as to mislead readers into thinking that the epistle was the work of Paul. In contrast to these viewpoints, this study proposes an alternative solution to the debate surrounding Hebrews—namely, that the epistle we now refer to as Hebrews originated as a Pauline speech that was later composed and edited by one of Paul's associates, such as Luke. This volume further suggests that the postscript was originally intended to serve as Pauline authentication.

Third, I consider the possibility that the earliest discernible edition(s) of the corpus to emerge was based on the duplicate copies of the letters produced during Paul's lifetime. While several contemporary scholars support the conclusion that Paul maintained duplicate copies of his letters, the implications of this theory for the canonical development of the Pauline letter corpus have not been adequately explored. As a result, this volume considers the possibility that Paul and/or his associates possessed a collection of the duplicate copies of his written correspondence and that this collection

may have served as the basis for the earliest edition(s) of the corpus. If Paul had in fact retained copies of his works, then the collection of his writings may have emerged much earlier and more naturally than is often assumed.

A fourth and final major subject of inquiry is the fate of the so-called lost letters of Paul. It is well known that references to nonextant letters may be found throughout the Pauline corpus. Passages such as 1 Cor 5:9, Col 4:16, and possibly 2 Cor 2:4, 7:8–9, and Eph 3:3 reveal that a fairly significant number of letters penned by Paul are no longer extant. But what happened to these writings? Was their loss an unfortunate and unintended tragedy? One of the principal conclusions of this volume offers a plausible solution to this question. I suggest that members of the Pauline circle, and possibly even Paul himself, took part in judiciously selecting and curating letters from a larger body of works in their possession to create an initial edition. Rather than simply arranging and preserving all of the letters attributed to Paul that could be found throughout the Christian world, the original collection included works that were intentionally preserved by Paul or his companions on the basis of their perceived importance and universal significance. While most theories relating to the lost letters of Paul assume that the exclusion of certain material from the corpus was the unfortunate result of tragic circumstances, it is more likely that this omission was deliberate and that only a relatively small number of epistles were selected from a wider body of writings. In other words, the “lost letters” were simply those which Paul or members of his apostolic circle determined not to include in the initial collection.



CHAPTER ONE

First-Century Literary Conventions and the Composition of the Pauline Corpus

Before examining the earliest extant witnesses to the Pauline writings, it will be helpful to make several observations related to the formation of letter collections of Paul's rough contemporaries and to examine literary practices that were common during the first century, particularly those providing insight related to the composition, collection, and publication of literature in the Roman world. By situating Paul in the literary environment of his time, we are better positioned to evaluate various theories pertaining to the composition of his writings, their formation, and early circulation.

The study of ancient literary conventions reveals that the writing process, dispatchment, and collection of ancient writings were in many ways dissimilar to modern literary practices. One of the more significant features of writing during the Roman period that is often overlooked is its communal nature. Unlike modern writers, it was common for first-century writers to enlist an amanuensis (secretary) to assist with the composition of the work, to hold reading sessions with close associates and friends for feedback and advice, and to rely on one or more individuals to deliver the completed writing to its intended destination. These practices have become more widely known in recent years as a result of advancements made in fields such as paleography, papyrology, and epistolography. New Testament scholars in particular have benefited greatly from the discovery of the codices at Nag Hammadi, the vast number of everyday Greek letters discovered at Oxyrhynchus, as well as the discovery of Greek manuscripts such as the Bodmer Papyri and the Chester Beatty Papyri, just to name a few.¹ While

1. One of the first major studies to assess the implication of some of these discoveries was G. Adolf Deissmann, *Light from the Ancient East: The New Testament*

no two manuscripts are alike, scholars have noted several trends and common features in ancient writing practices that may be observed in many manuscripts discovered over the last century in Egypt and throughout the Mediterranean world.

Assumed in this study is that Paul was, in the words of Porter, “a letter writer who apparently composed his letters following the conventions of ancient epistolary practice.”² Although Paul was an influential leader of a movement often known for its fresh readings of the Hebrew Scriptures and for proclaiming a message that was “to Jews a stumbling block and to Gentiles foolishness” (1 Cor 1:23), there is nothing to indicate that he was particularly innovative or abnormal with respect to his practice of composing literary documents, or the manner in which his works were subsequently assembled and prepared for public circulation. Therefore, it will be helpful to interact with several recent studies that provide insight regarding the practice of letter writing in the Greco-Roman world. This chapter is not intended to serve as an exhaustive study of these subjects but merely to establish the discernible literary practices in the ancient world, from which we can determine the likely circumstances that gave rise to the formation and subsequent circulation of the collection of the Pauline Epistles. As a result, this chapter will not address subjects such as the role of ancient letter carriers³ or the possibility that Paul occasionally collaborated with his associates

Illustrated by Recently Discovered Texts of the Greco-Roman World, trans. Lionel R. M. Strachan (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1910). Since the publication of Deissmann’s landmark volume over a century ago, numerous studies have been published on the literary world of the first century.

2. Stanley E. Porter, *Paul in Acts*, LPS (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2008), 101.

3. Some of the more notable studies of the tasks of letter carriers in the Greco-Roman world include Richards, *Paul and First-Century Letter Writing*, 171–209; Stirewalt, *Paul, the Letter Writer*, 9–19; Murphy-O’Connor, *Paul the Letter Writer*, 37–41; Margaret M. Mitchell, “The New Testament Envoys in the Context of Greco-Roman Diplomatic and Epistolary Conventions: The Example of Timothy and Titus,” *JBL* 111 (1992): 641–62; John L. White, *Light From Ancient Letters* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1986), 219–20; D. E. Aune, *The New Testament in its Literary Environment*, LEC 8 (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1987), 190; Eldon J. Epp, “New Testament Papyrus Manuscripts and Letter Carrying in Greco-Roman Times,” in *The Future of Early Christianity: Essays in Honor of Helmut Koester*, ed. B. A. Pearson et al. (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1991), 35–56; Hans-Josef Klauck, *Ancient Letters and the New Testament: A Guide to Context and Exegesis* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2006), 43–66; Peter M. Head, “Letter Carriers in the Ancient Jewish Epistolary Material,” in *Jewish and Christian Scripture as Artifact and Canon*, ed. Craig A.