

Mala grammatica non vitiat chartam..¹



Bible Words: *epistula*

The books of the Bible take many different forms, some are history books, some are poetry, some are prophecies and some are letters. Paul, James, Peter, John and Jude all wrote letters to the young churches of their day and letters are also included in other parts of the Bible too – there are seven short ones in the book of Revelation. In 2 Kings 19 a threatening letter is received by Hezekiah, the good King of Judah from his enemy Sennacherib. Can you remember where he took it? (Answer on the last page.) The New Testament letters are called “epistles” and you can see how this is related to the Latin word *epistula*.

A letter is a written communication. In a way the whole Bible is a letter. It is God's written communication to mankind setting out fully in language we can understand the message of the gospel: our need of a Saviour from sin and God's gracious provision of the Lord Jesus Christ who died to save all those who trust in Him.

Here is an actual letter from the second century AD. It was written in Greek and is from a young lad from Egypt who has enlisted in the Roman Army. <https://100falcons.wordpress.com/2009/11/25/a-real-letter-from-a-roman-soldier/>

As the article mentions it would have been rolled up to be sent. Although it is some 100 years later, perhaps the shorter New Testament letters looked a bit like it. They too were written in Greek.

Bible example:

*saluto vos ego Tertius qui scripsi **epistulam** in Domino* Romans 16:22

Easier word order:

*ego, Tertius, qui scripsi **epistulam**, saluto vos in Domino*

This little greeting found in Paul's epistle to the Romans is from the scribe who wrote down (*scripsi*) the letter presumably at Paul's dictation. You may be able to translate it already. If not, do what you can and then look it up to see if you are correct.

¹ Bad grammar does not impair the legal validity of a charter. Legal maxim.

He took it and spread it out before the Lord in the temple.