



# The *Original* Manuscript Order of the New Testament

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Every Bible student knows that the manuscript order of the books of the Tanakh (Jewish Old Testament) does not agree with the arrangement of the same books in the Christian Old Testament as printed today. Similarly, the manuscript order of the New Testament today differs from that of early copies. The ancient manuscript order of the books of the New Testament has the “Gospels” first -- followed by “Acts” then the “Jewish epistles” (James; 1 & 2 Peter; 1, 2 & 3 John and Jude). These, in turn, are followed by Paul’s epistles and then the book of Revelation.

This original order was rearranged by the Catholic Church in the Latin Vulgate version, in which Paul’s epistles were given first place -- ahead of the Jewish epistles which were relegated to second place. This gave the book of Romans a more prominent place in the New Testament as part of Rome’s bid for religious power. As a result, the Catholic Church effectively displaced and replaced the Jews by displacing the Jewish epistles and replacing them with Paul’s epistles beginning with “Romans.”

Notes the *Giving & Sharing Newsletter* –

In the oldest New Testament manuscripts, the books are in a different order than the New Testament of today -- James, not Romans, follows Acts as the first of the epistles. In the oldest manuscripts the “general epistles” of James, Peter, John, and Jude immediately follow Acts -- instead of Romans and Paul’s other letters to Gentile Churches, as in traditional Christian Bibles. The book order of the New Testament was scrambled by the early Roman Catholic hierarchy to **exalt Rome**, by making the epistle to Rome first among the epistles, followed by Paul’s other epistles to Gentile congregations. This tradition of scrambling makes the New Testament harder to rightly understand in reading it through (Newsletter 72, September 2003. Page 4).

Up until the 4th century A.D. all of the Church Fathers who list the New Testament books do so by placing the Jewish epistles **FIRST**, followed by Paul’s epistles. Not only that, but the ancient Aramaic manuscripts also follow this order. This is because Rome had no legal authority over those beyond its borders in the Parthian Empire where the Aramaic retained its position as the original, standard text.

The original manuscript order was extremely important because it agreed with the precept that the message was to go to the Jews first and then to the Gentiles. It also agrees with the concept

that James, Peter and John were emissaries that came BEFORE Paul -- see Galatians 1:17. The old manuscript order also agrees with the concept that Peter, James and John served as THREE PILLARS upon which Paul's message was built and upon whose authority he clearly recognized. Notice what Paul says in Galatians 2:9 –

Yes, when they came to know the undeserved kindness that was given me, James and Cephas [Peter] and John, the ones who seemed to be pillars, gave me and Barnabas the right hand of sharing together, that we should go to the nations, but they to those who are circumcised.

YEHOVAH God did not intend it to be the other way around with Paul being placed ahead of James, Peter and John. The reader of the New Testament was intended to read the “Jewish epistles” FIRST and then to read Paul's epistles, having already understood the Jewish epistles. The New Testament reader was intended to read James admonition concerning faith and works (James 2), as well as Peter's warnings about Paul being difficult to understand and his writings often twisted by those unwilling to obey Yeshua and YEHOVAH God (2 Peter 3:15-16) before ever attempting to understand the writings of Paul.

Adds the *Giving & Sharing Newsletter*:

As Peter says, Paul's “letters contain some things that are hard to understand” (II Peter 3:16, NIV) -- so why does traditional Christianity put them *before* letters that come first in the oldest original manuscripts, are easier to understand, and address fundamentals -- the general epistles of James, Peter, John, and Jude? I find Ernest L. Martin's thesis about the significance of the original manuscript order of the Old and New Testaments -- *Restoring the Original Bible* -- very edifying. He argues that Apostolic teaching is easier to rightly understand if the New Testament books are read in the order of the earliest manuscripts, instead of the revised order of Roman Catholicism, which became the traditional standard for Christianity (Newsletter 72, September 2003. Page 4).

In fact, when Westcott and Hort published their critical edition of the Greek New Testament in 1881, they returned to the original order of the books -- saying in their introduction:

...we have followed recent editors in abandoning the Hieronymic order familiar in modern Europe through the influence of the Latin Vulgate, in favour of the order most highly recommended by various Greek authorities of the fourth century...(Introduction to the *New Testament in the Original Greek*, pp. 320-321). [We, however, DO NOT agree that the Greek was the original].

So the ancient Aramaic places the Jewish epistles first -- as does the ancient Greek. The Vatican came along and actually rearranged the Scriptures to place Paul's epistles (beginning with Romans) in front and pushing the Jewish epistles behind them when creating the Latin Vulgate which served as the Roman Catholic standard text. This Catholic rearrangement was soon adopted by many Greek printed editions: the King James Version, virtually all English versions which followed -- and even nearly all Messianic editions. Strangely, even David Stern's *Jewish New Testa-*

*ment* and the *Complete Jewish Bible* (which restores the correct order of the Tanakh books) adopts Rome's rearrangement and scrambling of Scriptures.

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