2. The canon: "Catholics added books"

Often heard: "Catholics added the Apocrypha at the Council of Trent." / "Jesus and the Jews never accepted those books."
Also heard: "The same councils that gave you the New Testament also listed the books you call the Apocrypha."

The Old Testament is the Hebrew canon

HELD BY Lutheran Apocrypha good to read | Reformed | Anglican Apocrypha read, not doctrine | Methodist | Baptist

The Old Testament canon is the Hebrew Bible of 39 books (the Jewish 24) that Jesus and the apostles used. The extra books ("Apocrypha") are never quoted as Scripture in the New Testament, were not in the Hebrew canon, contain historical errors, and were doubted by Jerome. They may be read for history, not for doctrine.

VERSES CITED

Rom 3:2 (the oracles entrusted to the Jews); Luke 24:44 (Law, Prophets and Psalms); Matt 23:35 / Luke 11:51 (Abel to Zechariah, read as Genesis to Chronicles).

WHERE THE IDEA COMES FROM

Jerome (c. 390–405) preferred the Hebrew canon and called the others "ecclesiastical books." Luther's complete German Bible (1534) moved them to a separate "Apocrypha" section between the Testaments. Reformed confessions excluded them (Belgic 1561, Westminster 1646; Second London Baptist Confession 1.3). The 1611 King James Version still printed them; most English Protestant Bibles dropped them after the British and Foreign Bible Society stopped funding Bibles that included them (1826).

The Church's 46-book Old Testament

HELD BY Catholic | Orthodox wider Septuagint canon

Trent did not add books; it reaffirmed the canon the Church had used for over a thousand years after Luther questioned it. The apostles mostly quoted the Greek Septuagint, which contained these books, and the New Testament alludes to them. The Church, not the synagogue that rejected Christ, has authority to recognize Christian Scripture. The seven books are Tobit, Judith, 1–2 Maccabees, Wisdom, Sirach and Baruch, plus longer forms of Esther and Daniel.

VERSES CITED

Heb 11:35 // 2 Macc 7 (martyrs who refused release to rise again); Matt 27:43 // Wis 2:18–20; Rom 1:18–32 // Wis 13–14; Jas 1:19 // Sir 5:11; John 10:22 (Feast of Dedication, from 1 Macc 4:59). The NT also never quotes Esther, Ecclesiastes or Song of Songs.

EARLY CHURCH AND HISTORY

Councils of Hippo (393) and Carthage (397, 419) list the 46-book Old Testament; Augustine, *On Christian Doctrine* 2.8.13; Pope Innocent I to Exuperius (405). A Roman council of 382 is credited with the same list, though that document's authenticity is debated. Council of Florence (1442). Cyprian, writing to Antonianus about the lapsed (c. 251), urges pardon for penitents with "Remember whence you are fallen, and repent, and do the first works" (Rev 2:5), then "because it is written, Alms do deliver from death" (Tobit 4:10; cf. 12:9), and later "since it is written, God did not make death" (Wisdom 1:13) (Letter 51.22, ANF numbering). Catholic and Orthodox writers point out that Tobit and Wisdom stand in his chain of citation beside the Apocalypse, with the same introductory formula.

CATECHISM AND COUNCILS

CCC 105–108, 120, 138; Trent, Session 4 (1546).

Across the traditions

How each major tradition answers this question, in its own words and from its own documents.

Catholic

Trent did not add books: it reaffirmed the 46-book Old Testament the Church had used for over a thousand years, drawn from the Greek Septuagint the apostles mostly quoted and listed at Hippo (393), Carthage (397, 419) and Florence (1442). The full case is set out above.

Sources: Council of Trent, Session IV (1546); CCC 120.

Orthodox

The Old Testament follows the Greek Septuagint and includes the books Catholics call deuterocanonical, along with others such as 3 Maccabees and the Prayer of Manasseh. No ecumenical council fixed a single list: the Council in Trullo (692) ratified several older lists that differ from one another. The Synod of Jerusalem (1672) called these books "genuine parts of Scripture," while the Longer Catechism (1830) follows Athanasius in treating them as books read in the Church outside the Hebrew canon.

Sources: Council in Trullo, canon 2; Apostolic Canon 85; Confession of Dositheus, question 3; Longer Catechism of St. Philaret, Q. 31–35.

Lutheran

The Lutheran Confessions name the prophetic and apostolic Scriptures as the norm but give no list of books. Luther's 1534 Bible printed the

Reformed

The Old Testament is the 39 books of the Hebrew Bible. The Apocrypha are not inspired and cannot be used to prove doctrine. The

Apocrypha in a separate section, as books "not held to be equal to Holy Scripture, but useful and good to read." In practice Lutherans use the 66-book canon.

Sources: Formula of Concord, Epitome, "Rule and Norm" 1; Luther's German Bible (1534), title page of the Apocrypha.

Westminster Confession gives them no more authority than other human writings; the Belgic and Second Helvetic confessions let the church read them for instruction where they agree with Scripture.

Sources: Westminster Confession 1.2–3; Belgic Confession, arts. 4 and 6; Second Helvetic Confession, ch. 1.

Anglican

Article VI lists the books of the Hebrew canon as Scripture and then, following Jerome, names the other books, including 3 and 4 Esdras and the Prayer of Manasses, which "the Church doth read for example of life and instruction of manners" but does not use to establish doctrine.

Sources: Thirty-Nine Articles, VI.

Methodist

Article V lists the same Old Testament books as the Anglican Article VI and receives the New Testament books "as they are commonly received." Wesley's abridged Articles leave out the Anglican paragraph on the other books, so Methodist doctrine says nothing about the Apocrypha; Methodists use the 66-book canon.

Sources: Methodist Articles of Religion (1784), V.

Baptist

The Old Testament is the 39-book Hebrew Bible that Jesus and the apostles used. The Apocrypha may be read for history but not used to establish doctrine. The full case is set out above.

Sources: Second London Confession (1689), 1.2–3; Baptist Faith and Message (2000), art. I.

Where it gets contested: Those who hold the Hebrew-canon Old Testament (Lutherans, Reformed, Anglicans, Methodists and Baptists) note that some ancient voices preferred a narrower Old Testament: Athanasius (Festal Letter 39, 367, though he counted Baruch and the Letter of Jeremiah with Jeremiah), Cyril of Jerusalem, Jerome, and even Cardinal Cajetan in the 1530s. Catholics answer that these writers still quoted the books as Scripture in practice and that Jerome deferred to the Church's judgment. On Cyprian's citations of Tobit and Wisdom, Anglican and Lutheran writers answer that the Fathers read these books for edification, the standing Article VI gives them ("for example of life and instruction of manners"); Reformed readers add that Prov 10:2 ("righteousness delivereth from death") supplies the same thought, and that almsgiving there is the fruit of repentance, not its price. A useful counter:

> Luther also doubted Hebrews, James, Jude and Revelation (1522 prefaces, calling James "an epistle of straw"), which shows the canon cannot be settled by private judgment.

Catholic Bible editions

Catholic Bibles contain 73 books. Common English editions: Douay–Rheims (1582–1610, revised by Challoner in the 1750s), the Revised Standard Version Catholic Edition (1966) and Second Catholic Edition (2006), the New American Bible Revised Edition (2011), the Jerusalem Bible (1966) and New Jerusalem Bible (1985), and the English Standard Version Catholic Edition (2017).

See also: Classic arguments 23–31

More: The Old Testament canon lists in the Fathers (Chapter 3)

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