

The Deuterocanonical Books

BIBLE BASICS

Apocrypha vs Deuterocanonical

When one opens the pages of Holy Scripture, the words within are not just text but a divine symphony, resonating with the wisdom and love of God. Yet, as one journeys through the history of Christianity, an intriguing question arises: *How many books are in the Bible?*

Is it:

- **39 Old Testament and 27 New Testament books** as accepted by many Protestant traditions?
- **46 Old Testament and 27 New Testament books** as embraced by the Catholic Church and Orthodox traditions?
- **49 Old Testament and 32 New Testament books** where 32 NT books were considered in the composition NT canon in some locations of the early church
 - Note: Some of the early church canons included 1, 2 Clement, Shepherd of Hermas, Epistle of Barnaba and Didache.
- **46 Old Testament and 31 New Testament books** an unusual count unique to other traditions?

At the heart of this question lies the difference between what is often called the *Deuterocanonical Books* and the *Apocrypha*. For some, these terms are used interchangeably, but in the context of the Coptic Orthodox Church, they bear very distinct meanings.

The Deuterocanonical Books, meaning "second canon," are those texts found in the Greek Septuagint but absent from the Hebrew Bible. These include books like Tobit, Judith, Wisdom of Solomon, Sirach, Baruch, and the Maccabees. These writings have been cherished by the ancient Church, used in worship, and affirmed as Scripture within the Coptic Orthodox tradition. They are considered part of the divinely inspired canon, seamlessly integrated into the life and teachings of the Church.

In contrast, the term **Apocrypha**, meaning "hidden" or "no genuine," traditionally refers to texts that are not included in the canon of Scripture. These writings, while valuable for historical or moral reflection, are not regarded as inspired by the Holy Spirit and are therefore not read in the Church's liturgical life. "Apocrypha" is a misnomer, because the word "Apocrypha" means "concealed" and refers to books that contain hidden superstitions and nonsense contrary to Christian morals which were not accepted by the Church as part of the Canon. While the Protestant Reformation labeled the deuterocanonical books as "Apocrypha," the Coptic Orthodox Church firmly distinguishes between these inspired texts and non-canonical writings.

This difference in terminology and perception of these books has profound implications for how we understand the Scriptures. The Protestant Bible contains 39 Old Testament books, reflecting the Hebrew Bible, while the Coptic Orthodox Bible includes the broader 46 books of the Septuagint. The

New Testament, consistent across all traditions, comprises 27 books, but the richness of the Old Testament differs greatly depending on one's canon.

Canon	Old Testament Books	Notable Differences
Coptic Orthodox	46	<i>Includes Deuterocanonical books like 1 and 2 Maccabees, Tobit, Judith, Baruch, Wisdom of Solomon, Sirach, the Prayer of Manasseh, Psalm 151 and additions to Daniel and Esther.</i>
Catholic	46	<i>Includes Deuterocanonical books like 1 and 2 Maccabees, Tobit, Judith, Baruch, Wisdom of Solomon, Sirach, and additions to Daniel and Esther.</i>
Protestant	39	<i>Excludes Deuterocanonical books, considering them Apocrypha.</i>
Greek Orthodox	49	<i>Includes additional Old Testament books like 1 Esdras, 2 Esdras, 3 Maccabees, and 4 Maccabees (appendix).</i>
Orthodox Tewahedo	46	<i>Includes unique Old Testament books like 1 and 2 Ezra, Book of Enoch, Longer Jeremiah (including Lamentation & Baruch), Josippon, and a longer version of Jeremiah.</i>

Development of the Printed Canon

During the 16th century Martin Luther sought to make the Scriptures accessible to the common people by translating them into their native languages. His translation of the Bible into German was an achievement in this endeavor. However, the process of translation involved critical decisions regarding the source texts to be used.

For the Old Testament, Luther chose to rely primarily on the Hebrew Masoretic Text. This text, meticulously preserved and transmitted by Jewish scholars known as Masoretes, had become the standard Hebrew text of the Jewish community. Luther's decision to use the Masoretic Text was significant because it differed in some respects from the Septuagint, the Greek translation of the Hebrew Bible that had been widely used by Christians for centuries. In contrast to the Masoretic text, the Septuagint included the Deuterocanonical books. However, Luther, along with other Protestant reformers, questioned their canonical status. They argued that these books were not found in the Hebrew Masoretic Text and, therefore, should not be included in the Protestant Old Testament canon.

Luther's decision to exclude the Deuterocanonical books from his German translation reflected a broader trend in Protestantism towards a more streamlined and focused biblical canon. This emphasis on the Hebrew Masoretic Text as the authoritative source for the Old Testament had significant implications for the development of the Protestant Bible and its subsequent translations.

It is important to note that Luther's approach was not universally accepted within the Protestant movement. Some Protestant denominations, particularly those with closer ties to the Anglican tradition, continued to include the Deuterocanonical books in their Bibles, although often in a separate section. Nevertheless, Luther's translation and his emphasis on the Hebrew Masoretic Text had a profound and lasting impact on the shape of the Protestant biblical canon and the way in which the Bible was understood and interpreted by millions of Christians.

The printing press, a revolutionary invention of the 15th century, played a crucial role in disseminating Luther's German Bible and other vernacular translations. This newfound accessibility to the Scriptures in the common language empowered individuals to engage directly with the biblical text, fostering a sense of personal faith and religious autonomy. The combination of Luther's translation efforts and the printing press had a transformative effect on European society, contributing to the spread of literacy, religious reform, and the rise of individualism.

Categorization of the New Testament Canon

The formation of the New Testament canon, the authoritative collection of Christian scriptures, was a complex and gradual process that spanned several centuries. From the early days of the Church until at least 397 AD, there was significant diversity among different Christian communities regarding which books were considered canonical and which were not.

The Church at Antioch treated the Didache and 1st Clement as "scripture" during this period. However, they rejected several books that are now part of the New Testament canon, including 2 Peter, 2 & 3 John, Jude, and Revelation. The Church at Alexandria, on the other hand, also rejected most of these books, but accepted Jude and the Epistle of Barnabas.

The earliest existing list of canonical books, known as the Muratorian Canon, dates back to the late 2nd century. This list omits Hebrews, 1 & 2 Peter, 3 John, and James, but includes the Shepherd of Hermas and the Apocalypse of Peter. It is noteworthy that these lists were fluid and subject to later Church synods and Councils' standardization.

Eusebius, the renowned 4th Century Church Historian who attended the Council of Nicaea, reported in his History of the Church that Hebrews, 2 Peter, 2 & 3 John, James, Jude, & Revelation were still all "disputed" books. Despite this, he still included 1 Clement in his list of accepted New Testament canon. It is essential to emphasize that although the books we now consider "scripture" were written in the first century, the Church operated without voluminous copies of those scriptures and without consistency between churches for four centuries.

In 367 AD, St. Athanasius of Alexandria listed all of the current New Testament books in his Paschal Letter. However, he continued to quote the Didache as authoritative for the Church. Meanwhile, Rome rejected Hebrews but accepted the Shepherd of Hermas. None of the early Church Fathers or writers referred to a single, uniform set of "Scriptures" as we currently imagine them.

The first official council that accepted the present New Testament canon was a local synod, the Council of Hippo, in 393 AD. The minutes of that council have been lost, but they were read into the record at the Council of Carthage in 397 AD. Canon 24 from that Synod provides a definitive list of the books included in the New Testament canon, including the Gospels, Acts of the Apostles, Epistles of Paul, Hebrews, Epistles of Peter, John, James, Jude, and Revelation. This list excluded non-canonical books such as the Didache and the Shepherd of Hermas. Canon 24 from that Synod reads as follows:

Besides the canonical Scriptures, nothing shall be read in church under the name of divine Scriptures. Moreover, the canonical Scriptures are these: [then follows a list of Old Testament books, including all of the deuterocanonical books]. The New

Testament: the Gospels, four books; the Acts of the *Apostles*, one book; the Epistles of Paul, thirteen; of the same to the Hebrews; one Epistle; of Peter, two; of John, apostle, three; of James, one; of Jude, one; the Revelation of John. Concerning the confirmation of this canon, the transmarine (ie, Rome, across the Mediterranean Sea) Church shall be consulted. On the anniversaries of martyrs, their acts shall also be read.

The acceptance of this canon was not immediate, as some churches hesitated to adopt it. However, the influence of the Council of Carthage gradually led to wider acceptance, and by the end of the 5th century, the New Testament canon as we know it today was firmly established.

Categorization of the Old Testament Canon

The canonization of the Old Testament was not a single event but a gradual process. Within the Orthodox tradition, the Old Testament is understood as comprising two distinct sections: the **First Canon**, “*Protokanonika*”, and the **Second Canon**, “*Deuterokanonika*”, together forming a unified witness to God’s revelation.

The first section of the Old Testament, often referred to as the **First Canon**, corresponds to the books of the Hebrew Bible. These books were written primarily in Hebrew (with a few portions in Aramaic) and include the Torah (Law), the Nevi'im (Prophets), and the Ketuvim (Writings)—collectively known as the **Tanakh**.

1. The Structure of the First Canon:

- **The Torah (Law):** Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy.
These foundational books narrate the creation of the world, the calling of Abraham, the formation of Israel, and the giving of the Law at Sinai.
- **The Nevi'im (Prophets):** Joshua, Judges, Samuel, Kings, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and the Twelve Minor Prophets.
These books recount the history of Israel’s relationship with God, the role of the prophets, and the call to repentance.
- **The Ketuvim (Writings):** Psalms, Proverbs, Job, Ecclesiastes, Song of Songs, Ruth, Esther, Daniel, Ezra-Nehemiah, and Chronicles.
These diverse writings include poetry, wisdom literature, historical accounts, and apocalyptic visions.

The First canon books were compiled by Ezra the priest and preserved by Jewish scribes and scholars during the post-exilic period. By the time of Jesus, these books were recognized and revered as Scripture by the Jewish community, though disputes about certain texts persisted among different Jewish sects. Neither Ezra nor Nehemiah made mention of the second group (*Deuterokanonika*) as part of the first group, the reason being the books only appeared after Ezra’s death. Because these books, referred to above, were collated after Ezra’s death, the early Christian church considered them as authentic deuterocanonical books.

The Second Canon, known as the **Deuterocanonical Books**, comprises additional writings included in the Septuagint (the Greek translation of the Hebrew Scriptures). These books were written during the intertestamental period (circa 400–50 BC) in a time of great cultural and religious ferment as Jewish communities lived under Persian, Greek, and Roman rule.

2. The Structure of the Second Canon:

- **Historical Books:** Tobit, Judith, 1 and 2 Maccabees.
These books recount stories of divine providence, heroism, and the struggle for faith amidst persecution.
- **Wisdom Literature:** Wisdom of Solomon, Sirach (Ecclesiasticus).
These works provide profound reflections on the nature of God, morality, and the human condition.
- **Prophetic and Apocryphal Texts:** Baruch, Letter of Jeremiah, additions to Daniel (Susanna, Bel and the Dragon), additions to Esther, Prayer of Manasseh, and Psalm 151.
These texts include prayers, prophetic visions, and narrative expansions that enrich the biblical narrative.

The Deuterocanonical Books were widely accepted by Greek-speaking Jews, who had migrated throughout the Hellenistic world. These texts were included in the **Septuagint (LXX)**, a Greek translation of the Hebrew Scriptures commissioned in Alexandria around the 3rd century BC. The Septuagint became the primary version of the Scriptures for the early Church, especially among Gentile Christians, as Greek was the lingua franca of the Roman Empire.

Martin Luther wrote extensively about getting rid of the deuterocanonical books, because they were not in the then-current Hebrew Old Testament. However, the Hebrew Bible was not formalized until 90 AD, AFTER the Church began using the LXX (Septuagint), and the Hebrew-language Jewish version was chosen, by the Rabbis at Jamnia, specifically to STOP the spread of Christianity.

Usage Justification

The first Synodal decision on the canon of Scripture was made at the Council of Carthage in 397 AD. This council was convened by the Roman emperor Honorius and was attended by over 200 bishops from across the Western Roman Empire. The purpose of the council was to address various doctrinal and disciplinary issues, including the question of which books should be considered part of the Christian Bible.

At the Council of Carthage, the bishops present unanimously agreed to adopt the current list of New Testament books, which had been circulating among Christian communities for some time. This list included the four Gospels, the Acts of the Apostles, the letters of Paul and other apostles, and the Book of Revelation. The council also reaffirmed the use of the Septuagint (LXX) as the Old Testament of the Church. The LXX was a Greek translation of the Hebrew Bible that had been made in Alexandria, Egypt, in the 3rd century BC. It included several books that were not found in the Hebrew Bible, such as the books of Tobit, Judith, 1 and 2 Maccabees, and the Wisdom of Solomon. These books, known as the

deuterocanonical books, were specifically named and accepted as part of the Old Testament by the Council of Carthage.

The canons of the Council of Carthage were subsequently adopted by those parts of the Church participating in the 2nd Council of Constantinople in 553 AD. This council, which was convened by the Byzantine emperor Justinian I, reaffirmed the decisions of the Council of Carthage and declared that the LXX, including the deuterocanonical books, was the authoritative Old Testament of the Church.

Thus, from the days of Christ right through the Reformation, the canon of Scripture accepted by the Church included both the New Testament books and the Old Testament books of the LXX, including the deuterocanonical books. This canon remained the standard for both the Eastern and Western Churches until the Protestant Reformation in the 16th century, when some Protestant reformers, such as Martin Luther and John Calvin, rejected the deuterocanonical books as apocryphal and removed them from their Bibles.

Today, the Catholic Church, the Eastern Orthodox Church, and many other Christian denominations continue to accept the canon of Scripture as defined by the Council of Carthage and the 2nd Council of Constantinople. These churches believe that the deuterocanonical books are part of the inspired Word of God and that they should be included in the Christian Bible.

Additionally, fathers of the second and third generations, such as Clement of Alexandria, Origen, Dionysius of Alexandria, and Cyprian, as well as fathers of the fourth generation, including St. Basil, St. Gregory of Nazianzus, and St. John Chrysostom, all made equal references to the protocanonical and deuterocanonical books in their writings. These books were found in the Septuagint version, a translation of the Hebrew scriptures into Greek undertaken under the reign of Ptolemy II at Alexandria in 282 BC. The translation was carried out by 72 Jewish scholar-rabbis, indicating that they included the deuterocanonical books alongside the other books, granting them equal status.

In the Gospel of John (Chapter 10:22), Jesus Christ mentioned the Feast of Dedication. This feast was not mentioned in the protocanonical books of the Bible but was recorded in the Book of Maccabees. The Book of Maccabees reveals that Judas Maccabeus initiated this feast when he purified the temple from the profanities of the gentiles and renewed the altar. This serves as clear evidence that the Jews adopted the commemoration of this feast based on the information provided in the Book of Maccabees.

The inclusion of the deuterocanonical books in the Septuagint and their recognition by early church fathers and the Jewish community demonstrate their significance and acceptance as part of the sacred scriptures. These books offer valuable insights into Jewish history, culture, and religious beliefs during the intertestamental period and contribute to a deeper understanding of Christianity's roots and development.

Justification	Explanation
1	The Councils of Hippo (393 AD) and Carthage (397 AD) affirmed the authenticity of the Deuterocanonical books.
2	Early Church Fathers, including Clement of Alexandria, Origen, and Augustine, referenced and quoted from the Deuterocanonical books.
3	The early Church considered the Deuterocanonical books beneficial and worthy of being read in

church services, despite some debate.

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| 4 | The Apostolic Canons included the Deuterocanonical books as part of the canonical scriptures. |
| 5 | Traditional churches, such as the Catholic and Orthodox churches, have accepted the Deuterocanonical books as part of the canon. The Council of Trent (1546 AD) formally affirmed their canonical status within the Catholic Church. The Orthodox Church has also consistently included these books in its canon, recognizing their divine inspiration and authority. |
| 6 | The Septuagint, a Greek translation of the Hebrew Bible, included the Deuterocanonical books, indicating their early acceptance. |
| 7 | The mention of the Feast of Dedication in John 10:22 is linked to the events described in the Book of Maccabees, further supporting the authenticity of the Deuterocanonical books. |

Why then is it not in the Jewish Old Testament?

In 70 AD the destruction of the Second Temple in Jerusalem by the Roman army took place. This event led to a significant shift in Jewish religious and cultural practices. The destruction of the Temple, the central place of worship and sacrifice, necessitated a re-evaluation of Jewish religious life.

Following the Temple's destruction, the various Rabbinical schools in Jerusalem, which had often been in disagreement with each other, found a temporary unity in the face of this crisis. They established a new Rabbinical school in the coastal city of Jamnia (Yavne). This school became a crucial center for Jewish scholarship and the development of Rabbinic Judaism.

In 90 AD, the convening of a Rabbinical Council took place at Jamnia. This council was assembled to address a pressing issue for the Jewish community: the growing number of Jewish converts to Christianity. The rise of Christianity, with its roots in Judaism, posed a challenge to the established Jewish religious authorities. One of the major outcomes of the Council of Jamnia was the finalization of the Old Testament canon. This canon, known as the Masoretic Text, is the authoritative Hebrew text of the Hebrew Bible. The Masoretes, a group of Jewish scribes and scholars, meticulously preserved and transmitted this text over centuries.

It's important to note that the status of the Book of Esther remained a subject of debate even after the Council concluded. However, the Council's decisions regarding the rest of the canon were largely accepted by the Jewish community.

Another significant decision made by the Council of Jamnia was the explicit prohibition of the use of the Septuagint (LXX). The Septuagint had been widely used by Jews in the Diaspora. However, the Christian sect was also effectively using the Septuagint for their missionary efforts, leading to Jewish conversions. The Rabbinical Council, in an attempt to assert their authority and differentiate Judaism from Christianity, rejected the Septuagint. This decision further solidified the use of the Masoretic Text as the authoritative Hebrew text for the Jewish community.



Review Questions

1. What does Apocrypha mean? [hidden or not genuine]
2. What are the Deuteronical Books? [first 2 books of Maccabee, Tobit, Judith, Wisdom of Solomon, Sirach, Baruch, including the letter of Jeremiah, addition to Esther and addition to Daniel]
3. How many first canon (Protokanonika) OT books were recognized by the church vs the Jewish books? [39 vs 24]
4. How many OT books are recognized by the Protestant church? [39, they use the Jewish translation.]
5. At what council was the authenticity of the deuterocanon decided as part of the other books? [council at Hippo 393 AD]
6. Who were the fathers that made reference to the protocanonical and the deuterocanonical books? [Fathers of the second and third generations like Clement of Alexandria, Origen, Dionysius of Alexandria and Cyprian, also fathers of the fourth generation as Basil, Gregory of Nazianzus, Chrysostom.]
7. What was the Rabbinical council of 90 AD, after the destruction of the temple in 70 AD, decision regarding the OT? [The Council specifically forbade the use of the Septuagint – specifically because it was being used so successfully by the Christian sect in converting Jews.]
8. What was the Catholic church decision at the Trent Council in 1546 AD regarding the deuterocanonical books? [Whoever does not accept them will be ex-communicated.]
9. Which feast is mentioned in John's Gospel (Ch. 10:22) that Christ the Lord mentioned? [The Feast of Dedication]
10. The Feast of Dedication is mentioned in which deuterocanonical book? [The Book of Maccabees that Judas Maccabeus was the first to initiate this feast when he purified the temple of the profanities of the gentiles and renewed the altar.]