

# The Deuterocanonicals in Bible History

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A frequent Bible-content question is, “Why does the Catholic Bible contain more books than the Protestant Bible?” The following summary of Biblical development answers the question by showing, in outline form, the steps toward developing both the Catholic and the Protestant perspective.

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## The Development of the Jewish Bible

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~ 586 B.C. The Jews, living in exile in Babylon, completed the Torah and compiled and/or wrote other sacred texts (the *Prophets* and the *Writing*) to help preserve their traditions in a foreign land (cf. Psalm 137:4).

**Torah = Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy**

~ 536 B.C. The Jews completed all the books that are today components in Jewish Bible, but, outside the Torah, did not officially determine which of those books did and did not belong in the Bible.

**Jewish Bible Unofficially = Torah (completed) + (various) Prophets + (various) Writings**

~ 200 B.C. According to legend, the Alexandrian library requests a Greek translation of the Jewish Bible; the translation became popularly known as the *Septuagint*.

Some Jews wrote more sacred books in Greek, today called *Deuterocanonicals* or *Apocrypha*.

The Septuagint became the common Bible, and it included the books in the Hebrew-language Bible (translated into Greek) plus some other Greek-language books (Deuterocanonicals).

**Jewish Bible Unofficially = Torah + (various) Prophets + (various) Writings + (various) Deuterocanonicals**

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### Apocrypha, Deuterocanonicals, and Pseudepigrapha

- ❖ *Apocrypha* pejoratively indicating books that are *not* considered scripture.
- ❖ Protestants use the word *apocrypha* to refer to those books that Catholics and/or Orthodox consider scripture but that they themselves do not. These are the works present in the Vulgate and/or in some versions of the Septuagint.
- ❖ For many of the books that Protestants deem *apocrypha*, Catholics use the term *Deuterocanonical Books*.
- ❖ *Deuterocanonical* translates as *second list of books*, meaning *second grouping of books in the Bible*. Catholics reserve the word *apocrypha* for those religious works that are similar to scripture but that were never part of the Vulgate’s scripture.
- ❖ The Protestant term for religious works that are similar to scripture but were never part of the Vulgate and/or Septuagint is *pseudepigrapha*.

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## The Christian Jews

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~ A.D. 33      The Jews who followed Jesus continued using the then-current Jewish scriptural scheme, considering the largely-undefined Old Testament to be the whole Bible. Many used the Septuagint since its language (Greek) was also the common language of the day.

(Several versions of the Septuagint circulated, and various local Churches used various versions as the foundation of their Old Testament. For this reason, the modern Orthodox Church often claimed more Deuterocanonicals than the modern Catholic Church, and not all modern Orthodox Churches have the same Deuterocanonicals.<sup>1</sup>)

**Christian Jewish Bible Unofficially = Torah + (various) Prophets + (various) Writings + (various) Deuterocanonicals**

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## Christianity Leaves Judaism

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A.D. 70      The Romans destroyed the Jewish Temple.

St. Mark wrote his Gospel in Greek, including some Old Testament quotes. These quotes are mainly from the Septuagint rather than from independent translations.

Predominantly reacting to the destruction of the Temple, Orthodox Jews excommunicated Christian Jews from Jewish synagogues. The idea of distinctly Christian scriptures began to seem reasonable to Christians.

Sts. Matthew and Luke, like Mark, used the Septuagint as a source for many of their Old Testament quotes.

~ A.D. 100      The Gospel of John, the three letters of John, and the Book of Revelation are completed, completing the New Testament as Catholics know it today.<sup>2</sup>

The Jews did not want Christians using Jewish scripture to refute traditional Jewish ideals and interpretations. This was especially problematic for them when the Septuagint rendered a phrase differently than the Hebrew-language original. As a result, the Jews officially defined the content of their Bible at the *Council of Jamnia*; they ceased using the Septuagint and returned solely to the Hebrew-language Bible—most Christians at that time could understand Greek but not Hebrew. In rejecting the Septuagint, the Jews also overtly rejected the Greek-language Deuterocanonicals.

**Jewish Bible Officially = Torah + Prophets + Writings**  
– (any various) **Deuterocanonicals**

**Prophets = Joshua, Judges, 1 and 2 Samuel, 1 and 2 Kings, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Hosea, Joel, Amos, Obadiah, Jonah, Micah, Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah, Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi**

**Writings = Ruth, Job, Psalms, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of Songs, 1 and 2 Chronicles, Ezra, Nehemiah, Esther, Lamentations, and Daniel**

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<sup>1</sup> Some Eastern Churches may include Psalm 151 (the last in their Book of Psalms), 3 Maccabees, and/or 4 Maccabees.

<sup>2</sup> Since Christianity had not yet officially defined the contents of its Bible, Revelation's admonition not to *add to or take away* (Rev. 22:18, 19) seems to apply only to the Book of Revelation itself; compare this to Deuteronomy 4:2 and Proverbs 30:5, 6.

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## The Vulgate

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~ A.D. 200 The Latin-speaking Church translated the Septuagint into Latin. The version of the Septuagint that was used in the predominant translation included: Tobit, Judith, Esther (Greek), Wisdom, Sirach, Baruch, The Letter of Jeremiah (Baruch ch. 6), Song of the Three Young Men (Daniel 3:24-90), Susanna (Daniel ch. 13), Bel and the Dragon (Daniel ch. 14), 1 and 2 Maccabees, and 1 Esdras. This Latin version is known as the *Old Latin Bible*.

There was no one, uniform Old Latin Bible. Different translations and traditions preserved different books: A) The Prayer of Manasseh<sup>3</sup> was present in some late versions of the Old Latin Bible. B) It appears that, due to its Christian character, 2 Esdras also became popular in the Latin-speaking Church and was, by popular usage, eventually added to many manuscripts of the Old Latin Bible's Old Testament.

~ A.D. 400 At Pope Damasus I's request, St. Jerome translated the traditional Roman Bible anew into Latin; the translation was called the *Vulgate* and was meant to replace the Old Latin Bible. The meaning of *vulgar*, as the root of *Vulgate*, is not *obscene* but *common*, commonly spoken Latin as opposed to *formal* Latin.

Jerome began translating the Old Testament from the Septuagint but switched over to translating from Hebrew-language texts, and, where necessary, Aramaic-language texts, because he did not believe that the Septuagint was a good translation from which to work. In like manner, he did not favor the ideal that the Deuterocanonicals, those book outside the Hebrew-language Bible of his day, were scriptural.

Though Jerome relented to Pope Damasus' insistence and translated some of the Deuterocanonicals (Judith, Tobit, Daniel, Esther, and maybe 1 and 2 Maccabees) into Latin, he did so under protest. He, as well as some other reputable scholars of the age, questioned the logic of including these particular pre-Christian works in the Christian Bible. Other scholars of the day, St. Augustine, for example, supported their inclusion. The Christian scholarship of the period had not yet settled the issue their inclusion.

The Latin Church had traditionally used a wider list of Old Testament books than Jerome was willing to accept. For those Deuterocanonicals that Jerome did not translate, the Church simply used the familiar and traditional Old Latin Version, which predated Jerome. Thus, the rest of the modern Catholic Deuterocanonicals (Wisdom, Sirach, Baruch (inc. the Letter of Jeremiah), and maybe 1 and 2 Maccabees) were included. Like the Deuterocanonicals that Jerome did translate, these texts found their place in the Vulgate in the same specific order that they did in the Septuagint, incorporated amid the other Old Testament books.

Conversely, it seems that the uncertain place of 1 and 2 Esdras,<sup>4</sup> and the Prayer of Manasseh in the Old Latin Bible won them only a secondary place in the Vulgate; the Roman Church placed these texts only in the Vulgate's appendix, after the New Testament.

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<sup>3</sup> The Prayer of Manasseh was originally part of the Septuagint's *Odes of Solomon* but in some versions of the Septuagint the Prayer of Manasseh was a stand-alone work, present without the other Odes.

<sup>4</sup> Though 1 Esdras seems to have had a solid place in both the Septuagint and in the Old Latin Bible, it was placed only in the appendix of the completed Vulgate. Perhaps this is because of its confusing nature, being mostly quotes from other scriptural works aligned in a non-historical order.

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## The Reformation

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A.D. 1517 The Protestant Reformation began.

Martin Luther rejected the Deuterocanonicals, adopting instead the then-current Jewish scriptural scheme for the Old Testament. He did this in part because the Jews of his time did not recognize these books as Biblical, and also because he did not see any reason why the Catholic Church had *added* them.

**Protestant Bible Officially = Torah + Prophets + Writings + New Testament**  
– (any various) **Deuterocanonicals**

**Deuterocanonicals = Tobit, Judith, Esther (Greek), Wisdom, Sirach, Baruch, The Letter of Jeremiah (Baruch ch. 6), Song of the Three Young Men (Daniel 3:24-90), Susanna (Daniel ch. 13), Bel and the Dragon (Daniel ch. 14), 1, 2, 3, and 4 Maccabees, 1 and 2 Esdras, Psalm 151, and the Prayer of Manasseh**

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## The Council of Trent

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A.D. 1545-63 The Council of Trent: The Catholic Church officially determined the content of the Catholic Old Testament.<sup>5</sup>

**Catholic Bible Officially = Torah + Prophets + Writings + Deuterocanonicals**  
**+ New Testament**

**Deuterocanonicals = Tobit, Judith, Esther (Greek), Wisdom, Sirach, Baruch, The Letter of Jeremiah (Baruch ch. 6), Song of the Three Young Men (Daniel 3:24-90), Susanna (Daniel ch. 13), Bel and the Dragon (Daniel ch. 14), and 1 and 2 Maccabees**

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Do you want to see a fuller explanation of Bible History, with more context, that still focuses on the Deuterocanonical Books?

Check out the extended version of the *The Deuterocanonicals in Bible History* document, called *Jewish and Christian History, A Look at the Formation of the Bible*, at:

<http://www.holyfamilygb.org/LinkClick.aspx?fileticket=W4nzjsoUPkc%3d&tabid=132&mid=610>

or

- 1) Go to [www.holyfamilygb.org](http://www.holyfamilygb.org).
- 2) Rest the pointer on the *Religious Education* tab.
- 3) In the drop down menu, rest the pointer on *RCIA*.
- 4) in the drop down menu, click on *Lessons*.
- 5) *Under Holy Family Handouts*, click on *Jewish and Christian History*.

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<sup>5</sup> Since the Vulgate placed 1 and 2 Esdras, and the Prayer of Manasseh only in its appendix, as apocrypha, the Council of Trent likewise did not recognize these works as scriptural.