

## The Deuterocanonical Books

The Deuterocanonical books are a set of books and passages considered canonical by the Catholic Church, the Eastern Orthodox Church, and some other Christian traditions, but are not included in the Hebrew Bible or considered canonical by most Protestant denominations. The term "Deuterocanonical" means "second canon" and indicates that these books were accepted later than the primary canon.

The Deuterocanonical books are:

- Judith
- Tobit
- 1 and 2 Maccabees
- Wisdom (also known as "Wisdom of Solomon")
- Ecclesiasticus (also known as "Sirach")
- Baruch
- Additions to Esther (also called "Greek Esther")
- Additions to Daniel:
  - The Prayer of Azariah and Song of the Three Holy Children
  - Susanna
  - Bel and the Dragon

Sometimes remembered by the acrostic "J.T. MacWeb ED" from the first letter of the books/additions

These books are found in the Septuagint, the Greek translation of the Hebrew Scriptures, and were included in the Latin Vulgate Bible. However, during the Protestant Reformation, most Protestant denominations decided not to include them in their canon, referring to them as "Apocrypha." The Catholic Church, in response to the Reformation, reaffirmed the canonicity of these books at the Council of Trent in the 16th century.

### Not Included in Protestant and Reformed Bibles

That is not entirely true, depending on the translation and publisher. The deuterocanonical books are sometimes included in a separate section between the Old and New Testament books. Sometimes they are labeled as such, but alternatively labeled "Apocrypha."

The Protestant Reformers, such as Martin Luther, John Calvin, and others, did not include the Deuterocanonical books in the Bible for several reasons. Their decision was based on theological, historical, and textual considerations. Here's an outline of their collective reasoning:

#### Absence from the Hebrew Bible

The Deuterocanonical books were not part of the Hebrew Bible, which was the authoritative scripture for Judaism. The Protestant Reformers argued that since these books were not recognized by the Jewish community as part of their canon, they should not be included in the Christian Old Testament. The Jewish canon, often referred to as the Tanakh, was established by the time of the Protestant Reformation, and the Reformers sought to align their Old Testament with this Hebrew canon.

In addition, the Reformers note that the Deuterocanonical books do not claim to be written by prophets or under direct prophetic inspiration, which was a key criterion for canonicity according to the Reformers. They believed that books without clear prophetic endorsement lacked the necessary authority to be included in the canon.

**Catholic Counterpoint:** It should be noted that the Hebrew Canon was not formally set until the later first century AD as part of a larger response to the growing sect of Christians within Judaism. At this same Council of Jamnia, instructions were sent to the synagogues to purge Christians from the community.

In addition, given the history of exile and diaspora of Jews from the Promised Land, the majority of Jews lived outside Judah. Those communities used the Hebrew Scriptures that had been translated into Greek in the 2nd Century BC. This translation is known as the Septuagint and it contains all the Deutero-canonical books as part of the "Old Testament." It is noteworthy that when the New Testament writers quote the Old Testament, it is clear that in ~90% of the cases they are quoting from the Septuagint. The point is that the larger Jewish community used Scripture which included the contested books - as well as the New Testament authors. In addition, part of the agenda of Jamnia was to assert control over reformed Judaism that was now without its Temple (destroyed 20 years before in the Roman conquest of Jerusalem)

That being said, it should also be said that there are few NT citations from deutero-canonical books.

### **Doubts about Authorship and Antiquity**

The Reformers questioned the authenticity and authorship of the Deuterocanonical books. Some of these texts were written in Greek, rather than Hebrew, and were considered by the Reformers to be of later origin, making them less authoritative. They were also not universally recognized by early Christian writers and councils as inspired scripture.

**Catholic Counterpoint:** At the time of the Reformation the only available texts of the Old Testament were the Masoretic Text (MT), a 9th century text written in Hebrew in use in Spain - there were no older manuscripts available or known. All the other Old Testament manuscripts were Greek translations (and this is a complex topic in itself as there were differences - not major - but differences nonetheless.) In the 20th century the discovery of the Qumran Caves and Dead Sea Scrolls revealed 2nd century AD fragments and partial manuscripts of the Old Testament. By and large the Hebrew fragments and manuscripts are consistent with the Masoretic Text. These same discoveries also included deutero-canonical text in Hebrew and Aramaic.

Within the world of the early church patriarchs, here is a sample of some important views often cited by the Protestants and Reformers.

Melito of Sardis (died c. 180): Melito's Canon: Melito, a 2nd-century bishop, provided one of the earliest Christian lists of Old Testament books. His canon included only books from the Hebrew Bible and excluded the Deuterocanonical books.

Origen (c. 184–253): Origen's Position: Origen, an early Christian theologian and scholar, also distinguished between the Hebrew canon and other books. He acknowledged the existence of the Deuterocanonical books but noted that they were not accepted by the Jewish community. While Origen sometimes used these books in his writings, he did so with caution and did not seem to consider them on the same level as the Hebrew Scriptures.

Athanasius of Alexandria (c. 296–373): Athanasius' 39th Festal Letter (367 AD) provided a list of canonical books that excluded the Deuterocanonical books. He referred to these texts as "books read," indicating that they could be read in church for edification, but they were not considered part of the canon.

St. Jerome (c. 347–420): Jerome, a leading scholar of the early Church, is one of the most prominent figures who questioned the canonicity of the Deuterocanonical books. When he translated the Bible into Latin (the Vulgate), he included these books but distinguished them from the Hebrew Scriptures, referring to them as "apocryphal" or non-canonical. Jerome's reasoning was based on the fact that these books were not found in the Hebrew Bible. He believed they were useful for edification but not authoritative for establishing doctrine.

However, there was an equally distinguished list of early Church Fathers who considered the books to be inspired and part of Sacred Scripture.

St. Irenaeus of Lyons (c. 130–202) - Irenaeus, an early Church Father, referenced the Deuterocanonical books in his work "Against Heresies." For example, he cited the book of Wisdom and the story of Susanna (from the additions to Daniel) in his arguments against Gnosticism. His use of these texts indicates that he regarded them as authoritative Scripture.

St. Clement of Alexandria (c. 150–215) - an influential early Christian theologian, cited the Deuterocanonical books as Scripture in his writings. For example, he quoted from the book of Wisdom in his work "Stromata" and used Sirach and Tobit in his theological discussions. Clement's frequent use of these texts suggests that he regarded them as part of the canon.

The Didache, an early Christian work dated to the late 1st or early 2nd century, contains references to teachings similar to those found in the Deuterocanonical books, particularly the book of Sirach. While the Didache does not explicitly quote these books, its use of similar themes suggests that these texts were known and respected in early Christian communities.

St. Cyprian of Carthage (c. 200–258) - Cyprian, a prominent early Christian bishop and theologian, frequently quoted the Deuterocanonical books in his letters and treatises. He used these books as authoritative sources to support his arguments on various theological and ecclesiastical issues.

St. Augustine of Hippo (354–430) - St. Augustine was a strong advocate for the inclusion of the Deuterocanonical books in the Christian canon. He cited these books frequently in his writings, treating them as authoritative Scripture. Augustine played a significant role in the North African councils, such as the Synod of Hippo (393 AD) and the Councils of Carthage (397 and 419 AD), which affirmed the Deuterocanonical books as part of the Old Testament canon. Augustine used books like Wisdom, Sirach, and Tobit in his theological writings and sermons, considering them to be inspired and suitable for establishing doctrine.

## Church Councils

Council of Rome (382 AD) - This council, under Pope Damasus I, issued a decree that listed the canonical books of the Bible, including the Deuterocanonical books.

The Councils of Hippo (393 AD) and Carthage (397 and 419 AD) - These North African councils (local and not ecumenical), which were strongly influenced by Augustine, affirmed the inclusion of the Deuterocanonical books in the Old Testament canon. The decisions of these councils were later reaffirmed by the Church and influenced the development of the canon in the Western Church.

After the Councils of Hippo and Carthage affirmed the Deuterocanonical books as part of the Canon of Scripture, Pope Innocent I (401 to 417 AD) communicated with Bishops in the East and West about the local councils' decisions. After receiving concurrence, Pope Innocent confirmed

the Old Testament Canon (including the Deuterocanonical books). A 405 AD letter to Exuperius, the Bishop of Toulouse, is a remaining record of the confirmation, reinforcing the decisions made by the North African councils. The 16th century Council of Trent (responding to the Reformation claims) simply re-asserted a papal decision now 1200 years old.

## Historical Accuracy

The Protestant Reformers pointed out that some of the Deuterocanonical books contained historical inaccuracies and anachronisms, which led them to question the reliability of these texts as divinely inspired. Here are some of the specific historical inaccuracies or issues they raised:

- **Book of Judith's Historical Setting:** The book of Judith presents a story set during the reign of Nebuchadnezzar, who is said to be the king of the Assyrians (Judith 1:1). However, historically, Nebuchadnezzar was the king of the Babylonians, not the Assyrians. Also, Judith mentions the city of Bethulia, which plays a central role in the narrative, but there is no historical evidence for the existence of such a city in the region where it is said to have been located.
- **Book of Tobit's Chronological Discrepancies:** The book of Tobit claims that Tobit lived during the time of the Assyrian conquest of Israel and was taken captive to Nineveh. Tobit is said to be a contemporary of Jeroboam (9th century BC) and Sennacherib (late 8th century BC). However, the timeline and ages given in the book are inconsistent and would require Tobit to have lived an implausibly long life, well over 200 years, according to some interpretations of the text.
- **Book of Tobit's Geographical Confusion:** Tobit mentions that he traveled from Nineveh to Rages in Media, a journey that supposedly took only two days (Tobit 5:5-6). However, the actual distance between Nineveh and Rages would have required a much longer journey, making the account seem geographically inaccurate.
- **The Book of Baruch claims to have been written by Baruch, the scribe of the prophet Jeremiah, during the Babylonian Exile. However, some Reformers pointed out that the historical and linguistic evidence suggested a much later date of composition, long after Baruch's time. The book also references events and ideas that were not contemporaneous with Baruch, raising doubts about its authenticity.**
- **1 and 2 Maccabees' Historical Errors and Confusion:** While the books of 1 and 2 Maccabees are generally considered more historically reliable than some of the other Deuterocanonical books, the Reformers still noted certain inconsistencies and errors. For example, there are discrepancies between the accounts in 1 and 2 Maccabees regarding the timeline of events during the Maccabean revolt. Additionally, the books sometimes differ in their depiction of key figures and events, which raises questions about their reliability. Beyond historical issues, 2 Maccabees in particular was criticized for promoting the practice of praying for the dead (2 Maccabees 12:46), which the Reformers rejected as unbiblical.
- **Additions to Daniel:** The story of Bel and the Dragon, which is included in the Greek version of Daniel, was criticized for being a legend rather than a historical account. The Reformers viewed this and other additions to Daniel as fictional stories that did not belong in the canonical Bible. The story of Susanna, another addition to Daniel, was also considered a later addition with no historical basis. The Reformers saw it as a pious legend rather than inspired Scripture.

**Catholic Counterpoint:** What is interesting is that the 19th Century AD German biblical scholars that would not have accepted the 16th century arguments were such standards applied to books of Scripture that were accepted by the Reformation leaders. For example, the Book of Jonah which is

contemporary (in authorship) to the Book of Tobit and is far less historically or geographically accurate.

## Reformation and Scripture Alone

One of the central tenets of the Reformation was "*sola scriptura*" the belief that the Bible alone is the ultimate authority in matters of faith and doctrine. The Reformers sought to return to what they believed was the original, pure form of Christian scripture, which they identified with the Hebrew canon.

Rejection of Tradition: The Reformers were critical of what they saw as corruptions in the Church that had developed over time, including the addition of books to the canon that they believed were not originally part of scripture. They viewed the inclusion of the Deuterocanonical books as part of this corruption and sought to remove them.

**Catholic Counterpoint:** Scripture itself never claims *sola scriptura* as characteristic. Romans 3:28 was the closest verse in Scripture that seemed to prove Martin Luther's novel assertion: "*For we consider that a person is justified by faith apart from works of the law*" (Romans 3:28) However, it lacked the all-important word alone that would have makes Luther's sola doctrine true. Rather than adjust his theology, Luther adjusted the Bible. In his translation of Romans, Luther added the word alone to verse 3:28 (making it say "man is justified by faith alone apart from the deeds of the law") in order to make it appear that he had biblical support.

Similarly, Luther asserted "*sola fide*" - faith alone. James 2:24 is the only verse in the Bible that uses the phrase "faith alone"—and it says that people are "*justified by works and not by faith alone.*" This is one reason why Martin Luther wanted the epistle of James removed from the Bible. Luther himself admitted that *sola fide* contradicts James—even claiming, "I do not regard it as the writing of an apostle." In the pre-1530 version of his Preface to the Epistles of St. James, Luther held that James "is flatly against St. Paul and all the rest of Scripture in ascribing justification to works. . . . He mangles the scriptures and thereby opposes Paul and all Scripture."

The counter-point being, there is a track record of removing books from the Canon of Scripture that had been accepted for ~1200 years

## Theological Concerns

The Protestant Reformers had several theological concerns regarding the Deuterocanonical books, which contributed to their decision to exclude these books from the Protestant Bible. These concerns were centered around doctrines and practices that the Reformers believed were incompatible with core Christian teachings as they understood them. Here are the key theological concerns cited by the Reformers:

### Doctrine of Purgatory

- **2 Maccabees 12:45-46:** The passage in 2 Maccabees describes Judas Maccabeus making atonement for the dead so that they might be delivered from their sin, which suggests the practice of praying for the dead and implies a belief in an intermediate state where souls could be purified after death. This was interpreted by the Catholic Church as support for the doctrine of Purgatory.
- **Reformers' Concern:** The Reformers rejected the doctrine of Purgatory, arguing that it had no basis in the canonical books of the Old or New Testaments. They believed that the idea of an intermediate state where souls are purified before entering heaven undermined the sufficiency of Christ's sacrifice and the doctrine of justification by faith alone - even as they ignored the text of

Revelation 21:27 that nothing unclean or impure will enter heaven, the refiner's fire of Malachi 3, and other texts that indicate a purgation of the last vestiges of corrupt humanity.

### **Intercession of Saints and Angels**

- **Tobit 12:12, 15:** The book of Tobit presents the archangel Raphael interceding for Tobias and his family, and mentions the practice of asking for angelic intercession.
- **Reformers' Concern:** The Reformers rejected the practice of invoking saints or angels as intercessors, arguing that Christ is the sole mediator between God and humanity (1 Timothy 2:5). They believed that the Deuterocanonical books' support for intercessory roles of saints and angels encouraged practices that detracted from the centrality of Christ's mediatory role.

### **Salvation by Works**

- **Sirach 3:30:** The verse states that "almsgiving atones for sin," which seems to suggest that acts of charity can contribute to one's salvation or atone for sin.
- **Reformers' Concern:** The Reformers strongly opposed any suggestion that human works could contribute to salvation or atone for sins. They believed that salvation is by grace through faith alone, not by works (Ephesians 2:8-9). The teaching in Sirach was seen as conflicting with the doctrine of justification by faith alone, a central tenet of the Reformation.

### **Prayer for the Dead**

- **2 Maccabees 12:44-46:** As mentioned earlier, this passage discusses the offering of prayers and sacrifices for the dead. The text praises the act of praying for the dead, suggesting that it is beneficial for their salvation.
- **Reformers' Concern:** The Reformers argued that this practice had no basis in the canonical Scriptures and was contrary to their understanding of salvation. They held that after death, a person's eternal destiny is sealed, making prayers for the dead ineffective and theologically unsound.

### **A Catholic Counterpoint**

The Catholic Church teaches the "Communion of Saints," which refers to the spiritual solidarity between the faithful on earth, the souls in Purgatory, and the saints in Heaven. All members of the Church, whether living or deceased, are united in Christ and can assist each other through prayer. The Scriptural basis is:

- Hebrews 12:1 refers to a "great cloud of witnesses" surrounding Christians, implying that those in Heaven are aware of and concerned with the lives of those on earth.
- 1 Corinthians 12:12-27 emphasizes the unity of the Body of Christ, where all members are interconnected.

It is part of a broader understanding of Intercessory Prayer. Catholics believe that just as Christians on earth can pray for one another, those in Heaven can also pray for us. The saints and angels can intercede on behalf of those on earth. The Scriptural basis is:

- Revelation 5:8 describes the saints in Heaven offering the prayers of the faithful to God, symbolized as "golden bowls full of incense."
- James 5:16 underscores the efficacy of the prayers of a righteous person, which is extended to those who are in Heaven.

As regards the unique Mediatorship of Christ, the Catholic Church acknowledges that Christ is the sole mediator between God and humanity (1 Timothy 2:5). However, this does not exclude the participation of others in intercession, as all intercession is ultimately through Christ and dependent on His unique mediatorship. As such, the Saints and angels, as part of the Body of Christ, participate in His mediation by interceding for others. Their intercession does not detract from Christ's unique role but rather is a way in which His grace is made manifest.