

Was the Canon Only Fixed at Trent?

Answering the assertion that before 1545 there was “no such thing as an agreed upon ‘Roman Catholic Bible’”

THE CLAIM — WES HUFF (@WESLEYLHUFF), X, JULY 21, 2026

That prior to the Council of Trent (1545) the Catholic Church had no agreed canon of Scripture; and that Cardinal Ximénez, in the preface to his Complutensian Polyglot Bible (before 1517), described the seven deuterocanonical books as outside the canon — received for the edification of the people rather than for confirming ecclesiastical doctrine. Conclusion drawn: the books are edifying, but not canonical and insufficient to establish doctrine.

ANSWER NO. 1 — THE DECISIVE COUNTEREXAMPLE

Florence, 1442: A Century Before Trent

The ecumenical Council of Florence, in the bull *Cantate Domino* (Feb. 4, 1442) — one hundred and four years before Trent’s decree, and seventy years before the Complutensian Polyglot was printed — listed the entire 73-book canon by name:

“[The Holy Roman Church] accepts and venerates their books, whose titles are as follows: five books of Moses... Tobit, Judith, Esther, Job... Wisdom, Ecclesiasticus [Sirach]... Baruch... two books of the Maccabees...”

— COUNCIL OF FLORENCE, Bull *Cantate Domino* (A.D. 1442)

And Florence was itself only repeating Rome (382), Hippo (393), Carthage (397, 419), Pope Innocent I (405), and II Nicaea (787). Trent defined nothing new — it dogmatically defended an 1,100-year-old list because the Reformers had just rejected it. See the full timeline on page 2.

2. A preface is not the magisterium

Ximénez’s preface is a scholar’s private opinion echoing St. Jerome’s minority view — a view the Church heard for a millennium and never adopted. Cardinal Cajetan held it too. Individual dissent is precisely why councils exist; the question is never “did any scholar demur?” but “what did the Church authoritatively teach?” On that record the answer never changed.

“What sin have I committed if I follow the judgment of the churches?”

— ST. JEROME himself, Against Rufinus (A.D. 401), defending the deuterocanonical parts of Daniel

3. They all still printed the books

Ximénez included the deuterocanonicals in his own Polyglot. Luther kept them in his German Bible. So did the Geneva Bible and the 1611 King James. The 66-book Protestant Bible wasn’t standardized until **1825**, when the British and Foreign Bible Society dropped the books — meaning it was never the Bible of Luther, Calvin, Knox, or even the Wesleys.

“None of the major Bible translations that emerged during the German, Swiss, or English reformations produced a Bible of simply 66 books.”

— BEN WITHERINGTON III (Methodist scholar), Christian History, 2017

THE BOTTOM LINE

A cardinal’s preface is an opinion. A council is the Church’s answer — and from 382 to 1546, the Church’s answer never changed.



The Canon of Scripture: The Earliest Witnesses

The oldest documents and councils that list the books of the Bible — dated, located, and tracked on one question: did they include the seven deuterocanonical books?

■ Includes the deuterocanon ■ Mixed / two-tier ■ Hebrew-style list (excludes)

THE AGE OF PERSECUTION — A.D. 64–313

Nero (64) • Domitian (c. 95) • Decius (250) • Valerian (257) • Diocletian's Great Persecution (303–311). Christianity is illegal — the Church worships in the catacombs and her bishops cannot meet in open council. Every canon witness of this age is an individual writer, not a council.

- c. 140 ● **Marcion's Canon** ROME
First known "canon" — a heretic's list rejecting the entire Old Testament. It forced the Church to answer.
- c. 170 ● **Melito of Sardis** SARDIS, ASIA MINOR
Earliest Christian OT list; follows the Hebrew count he learned in Palestine — and omits Esther.
- c. 170–200 ● **Muratorian Fragment** ROME
Oldest orthodox New Testament list (~22 books) — and it counts Wisdom of Solomon among the received books.
- c. 230–250 ● **Origen** ALEXANDRIA & CAESAREA
Reports the 22 books "as the Hebrews count them" — yet cites Wisdom, Sirach, Tobit & Maccabees as Scripture.
- c. 303–325 ● **Eusebius, Church History** CAESAREA, PALESTINE
Sorts all books into acknowledged, disputed & spurious — a snapshot just before the canon was settled.

A.D. 313 — THE EDICT OF MILAN: Constantine legalizes Christianity. For the first time in 250 years, bishops are free to gather openly — and the councils begin.

THE AGE OF COUNCILS — THE QUESTION IS SETTLED

- c. 325–350 ● **Codices Vaticanus & Sinaiticus** EGYPT / CAESAREA
The oldest complete Bibles in existence — the deuterocanonicals bound in with the rest, not in an appendix.
- c. 350 ● **Cyril of Jerusalem** JERUSALEM
A 22-book catechetical list — though he keeps Baruch with Jeremiah.
- c. 360 ● **Cheltenham (Mommson) List** NORTH AFRICA
Latin list with Tobit, Judith & Maccabees — Africa was using these books decades before Hippo.
- c. 363 ● **Council of Laodicea** PHRYGIA, ASIA MINOR
Regional Eastern list, Hebrew-style plus Baruch; its NT list omits Revelation. (Canon 60 is of disputed authenticity.)
- 367 ● **St. Athanasius, 39th Festal Letter** ALEXANDRIA, EGYPT
First exact 27-book NT list. His OT is two-tier: Wisdom, Sirach, Tobit & Judith "to be read" — and Esther is excluded.
- 382 ● **COUNCIL OF ROME — Pope St. Damasus I** ROME
The full 73-book canon (46 OT + 27 NT) defined — Wisdom, Sirach, Tobit, Judith & Maccabees listed by name.
- 393 ● **COUNCIL OF HIPPO** HIPPO REGIUS, NORTH AFRICA
First council to ratify the complete canon in a formal conciliar canon (Canon 36). St. Augustine was present.
- 397 ● **III COUNCIL OF CARTHAGE** CARTHAGE, NORTH AFRICA
Confirms Hippo: "nothing except the canonical scriptures should be read in the Church" (Canon 47).
- 405 ● **POPE ST. INNOCENT I** ROME
Letter to Bishop Exuperius of Toulouse confirms the identical 73-book list.
- 419 ● **COUNCIL OF CARTHAGE** CARTHAGE, NORTH AFRICA
Reaffirms the canon and sends it to Rome for confirmation by Pope Boniface I.

RATIFIED AGAIN & AGAIN: II Nicaea (787) • Florence (1442) • Trent (1546, dogmatic definition) — the same 73 books, unchanged for over 1,100 years before the Reformation.



Why the Church Includes the Deuterocanon

Tobit • Judith • Wisdom • Sirach • Baruch • 1 & 2 Maccabees — plus parts of Daniel and Esther

1. The Apostles' Bible included them

The early Christians read the Septuagint, the Greek Old Testament containing all seven books. The New Testament writers quote it over 300 times.

"The Old Testament thus admitted as authoritative in the Church... always included, though with varying degrees of recognition, the so-called apocrypha or deuterocanonical books."

— J.N.D. KELLY (Protestant historian), *Early Christian Doctrines*

2. The earliest Christians quoted them as Scripture

The Didache quotes Sirach (A.D. 70); Barnabas and Clement of Rome quote Wisdom (70s–80s); Polycarp quotes Tobit; Cyprian quotes Wisdom and Maccabees alongside Genesis. No pre-Nicene Father declared them uninspired.

"When you can do good, defer it not, because 'alms delivers from death' [Tobit 4:10]."

— ST. POLYCARP, disciple of the Apostle John (A.D. 135)

3. There was no fixed Jewish canon to inherit

Sadducees accepted only the Torah; Greek-speaking Jews used the Septuagint; the Dead Sea Scrolls include Sirach, Tobit & Baruch. The rabbis at Javneh (c. A.D. 80) who trimmed the list also rejected the entire New Testament.

"If anything is certain, it is that there was no common canon among the Jews at the time of Christ."

— JASON EVERT, *Catholic Answers*

4. The Church settled it — and never wavered

Rome (382), Hippo (393), Carthage (397, 419), II Nicaea (787), Florence (1442), Trent (1546): the identical list every time. Trent added nothing; it dogmatically defended what was already 1,100 years old.

"Nothing except the canonical scriptures should be read in the Church under the name of the divine scriptures... Tobit, Judith, Esther... two books of the Maccabees."

— III COUNCIL OF CARTHAGE, Canon 47 (A.D. 397)

5. Catholics didn't add them — Protestants removed them

Luther's own German Bible included them. So did the 1611 King James and the Gutenberg Bible. They appeared in nearly every Bible until the British Foreign Bible Society excised them in 1825.

"It is historically demonstrable that Catholics did not add the books, Protestants took them out."

— JASON EVERT, "How to Defend the Deuterocanonicals"

6. Only the Church can guarantee the canon

The Bible has no inspired table of contents. Every Christian who trusts the 27-book New Testament is already trusting the same councils that gave the 46-book Old Testament.

"We have no other assurance that the books of Moses, the four Gospels, and the other books are the true word of God, but by the canon of the Catholic Church."

— ST. AUGUSTINE • Even Luther: "We are obliged to yield many things to the papists — that they possess the Word of God, which we received from them."

THE BOTTOM LINE

The real question is not "Why does the Catholic Bible have extra books?" — it is "Who had the authority to take them out?"



Where the New Testament Echoes These Books

No “it is written” formula — but neither is there one for Song of Songs, Ecclesiastes, Esther, or Nahum. What the New Testament shows is deep dependence.

STRONGEST PROOF NO. 1**Hebrews 11:35 ↔ 2 Maccabees 7**

“Some were tortured, refusing to accept release, that they might rise again to a better life.” The mother and her seven martyred sons — a story found nowhere in the Protestant Old Testament.

STRONGEST PROOF NO. 2**Matthew 27:41–43 ↔ Wisdom 2:12–20**

The mockery at the Cross — “He trusts in God; let God deliver him... for he said, ‘I am the Son of God’” — tracks Wisdom’s prophecy of the persecuted righteous man almost line by line.

NEW TESTAMENT	SOURCE	THE CONNECTION
WISDOM OF SOLOMON		
Romans 1:19–32	Wisdom 13–14	Paul’s whole argument — God known from creation, idolatry, moral collapse — follows Wisdom’s structure.
Romans 5:12	Wisdom 2:24	“Through the devil’s envy death entered the world.”
Romans 9:21	Wisdom 15:7	The potter’s right over the clay.
Ephesians 6:13–17	Wisdom 5:17–20	The armor of God: breastplate of righteousness, helmet, shield.
Hebrews 1:3	Wisdom 7:26	Christ the “radiance of God’s glory” ↔ wisdom the “reflection of eternal light.”
1 Peter 1:6–7	Wisdom 3:5–6	Faith tested like gold in the furnace.
SIRACH (ECCLESIASTICUS)		
Matthew 6:14–15	Sirach 28:2	“Forgive your neighbor... and then your sins will be pardoned when you pray.”
Matthew 11:28–30	Sirach 51:23–27	“Come to me... put your neck under the yoke... find rest.”
James 1:19	Sirach 5:11	“Be quick to hear, slow to speak.”
Luke 12:16–21	Sirach 11:18–19	The rich fool who stores up goods and dies that night.
Romans 2:11	Sirach 35:12–13	God shows no partiality.
TOBIT		
Revelation 8:3–4	Tobit 12:12–15	An angel presents the prayers of the saints before God — Raphael, “one of the seven.”
Matthew 7:12	Tobit 4:15	The Golden Rule (in its earlier negative form).
Matthew 22:23–28	Tobit 3:8	The Sadducees’ seven-husbands hypothetical mirrors Sarah’s story.
Revelation 21:18–21	Tobit 13:16–17	The New Jerusalem’s streets of gold and gates of jewels.
1 & 2 MACCABEES / JUDITH		
John 10:22	1 Macc 4:36–59	Jesus keeps the Feast of Dedication (Hanukkah) — instituted only in Maccabees.
Hebrews 11:38	2 Macc 5–10	The faithful wandering in deserts, mountains, dens and caves.
Luke 1:42	Judith 13:18	“Blessed are you among women” echoes the blessing of Judith.

The one-two punch: Hebrews 11:35 requires 2 Maccabees 7 to make sense, and Matthew 27 reads as a fulfillment of Wisdom 2. Apply the “never quoted” standard consistently and it would expel a half-dozen protocanonical books too.