

66 BOOKS

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The **Old Testament** lays the foundation of God's relationship with humanity and His covenant with Israel.

- **Pentateuch (Torah):** The first five books—Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy—are traditionally attributed to Moses. Modern scholarship suggests they were composed by multiple authors between the 10th and 5th centuries B.C.E. These books cover creation, laws, and the early history of Israel.
- **Historical Books:** This section includes books like Joshua, Judges, Ruth, and the two books of Samuel and Kings, among others. These books narrate Israel's journey from the conquest of Canaan to the Babylonian exile, highlighting the nation's struggles and victories.
- **Wisdom and Poetic Books:** Comprising Job, Psalms, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and the Song of Solomon, these writings explore themes of worship, human experience, and the pursuit of wisdom.
- **Prophetic Books:** Featuring major prophets like Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel, as well as the twelve minor prophets, these books deliver messages of warning, hope, and future restoration.

The history of the Bible, Christian theology, and the church's development is a story of faith, conflict, and dedication to preserving sacred scriptures. Through the contributions of early church leaders, theologians, and reformers, Christianity expanded and diversified into the denominations we see today, all grounded in the 66 books of the Bible that have shaped religious belief for centuries.

It's History and Canonization

The modern Bible consists of 66 books—39 in the Old Testament and 27 in the New Testament. These books were chosen through a historical process known as canonization, involving theological reflection, church councils, and centuries of use by the Christian community. This essay explores how the Bible came to include these specific books, the history of the Apocryphal books, the criteria for canonization, key figures in church history, and the historical development of the Catholic, Episcopal, and Protestant churches, including the Reformation.

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I. The Formation of the Biblical Canon

Old Testament Canon (Hebrew Scriptures)

- Origin: The Old Testament is rooted in ancient Hebrew writings compiled over 1,000 years (c. 1400-400 B.C.).
- Canonization Process:
- Early Jewish communities considered the Law (Torah), the Prophets (Nevi'im), and the Writings (Ketuvim) as sacred scriptures.
- Finalized by Jewish scholars around 90 A.D. at the Council of Jamnia.

New Testament Canon (Christian Scriptures)

- Origins: The New Testament was written between 50 and 100 A.D. by apostles and early Christian leaders.
- Key Milestones:
- Marcion's Canon (c. 140 A.D.): A heretical list excluding the Old Testament and limiting New Testament books prompted the church to define the true canon.
- Muratorian Fragment (c. 170 A.D.): One of the earliest known lists of New Testament books.
- Athanasius' Easter Letter (367 A.D.): First full list of the 27 New Testament books.
- Councils of Hippo (393 A.D.) and Carthage (397 A.D.): Officially recognized the New Testament canon used today.



2. The Apocryphal Books and Their History

The Apocrypha refers to 14-15 books written between the Old and New Testaments, primarily in Greek. These books include works such as Tobit, Judith, 1 & 2 Maccabees, Wisdom of Solomon, and Baruch.

Why Were the Apocryphal Books Not Included?

- Jewish View: The Jewish canon excluded

these books, considering only Hebrew texts authoritative.

- Early Christian View: While some church fathers (e.g., Augustine) accepted the Apocrypha, others (e.g., Jerome) rejected them as non-canonical.
- Reformation Decision: During the Protestant Reformation, reformers like Martin Luther excluded the Apocrypha because they were not considered inspired by the original Hebrew tradition. The Catholic Church formally affirmed the Apocrypha as canonical during the Council of Trent (1546).
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3. Criteria for Canonization

1. Apostolic Origin: Written by or closely connected to an apostle.
2. Orthodox Content: Consistent with established Christian beliefs.
3. Widespread Use: Recognized by the broader Christian community in worship and teaching.
4. Divine Inspiration: Understood to be guided by the Holy Spirit.

4. Key Figures in Church History

Early Church Fathers (2nd-5th Centuries)

1. Ignatius of Antioch (c. 35-107 A.D.) – Early Christian martyr who shaped church governance.
2. Justin Martyr (c. 100-165 A.D.) – Defended Christianity through philosophy.
3. Irenaeus (c. 130-202 A.D.) – Fought heresies and affirmed apostolic succession.
4. Tertullian (c. 160-225 A.D.) – Developed Christian theology and coined Trinity.
5. Origen (c. 185-254 A.D.) – Biblical scholar and theologian.
6. Athanasius (c. 296-373 A.D.) – Defended Christ's divinity during the Arian controversy.
7. Augustine of Hippo (354-430 A.D.) – Theologian whose writings shaped Western Christianity.

New Testament

The **New Testament** unveils the life of Jesus Christ, the birth of the Church, and the hope of eternal life. It is divided into the following sections:

- **Gospels:** The first four books — Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John — provide distinct perspectives on the life, teachings, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ.
- **Acts of the Apostles:** This book recounts the formation of the early Church and the spread of the Christian message after Jesus' ascension.
- **Pauline Epistles:** Letters attributed to the Apostle Paul, such as Romans, 1 and 2 Corinthians, and Galatians, address doctrinal issues and offer guidance to early Christian communities.
- **General Epistles and Revelation:** This section includes letters like Hebrews, James, and the epistles of Peter and John, concluding with Revelation, an apocalyptic vision of the end times and God's ultimate victory.

5. History of the Catholic Church

Early Church (1st-4th Centuries)

- Christianity grew under Roman persecution until Emperor Constantine legalized it through the Edict of Milan (313 A.D.).
- The Council of Nicaea (325 A.D.) established foundational Christian doctrines like the Trinity.

Medieval Church (5th-15th Centuries)

- The Roman Catholic Church became the dominant Christian institution in Europe.
- Key figures: Pope Gregory the Great (540-604), Thomas Aquinas (1225-1274), and St. Francis of Assisi (1182-1226).

Reformation and Beyond

- The Catholic Church reformed through the Council of Trent (1545-1563) after the Protestant Reformation.



6. The Reformation and Major Protestant Denominations

The Reformation (16th Century)

- Initiated by Martin Luther (1483-1546), who posted his 95 Theses in 1517.
- Resulted in the break from the Roman Catholic Church.

Key Protestant Leaders

- John Calvin (1509-1564) – Reformed theology and predestination.
- Ulrich Zwingli (1484-1531) – Swiss Reformation leader.
- John Knox (1513-1572) – Founder of the Presbyterian Church.

Major Denominations from the Reformation

1. Lutheran: Based on Martin Luther's teachings.
2. Reformed/Presbyterian: Calvinist theology.
3. Anglican (Church of England): Split from Rome under Henry VIII in 1534.
4. Anabaptists (Amish, Mennonites): Emphasized adult baptism.
5. Methodists and Baptists: Emerging later during evangelical revivals.

7. Difference Between Roman Catholics, Episcopalians, and Protestants

Church Origins Authority Key Beliefs

Roman Catholic Apostolic succession from Peter Pope, Tradition, and Scripture Sacraments, Church Tradition

Episcopal Church Anglican Reformation (1534) Bishops, Tradition, Scripture Similar to Catholicism but rejects Papal authority

Protestant Reformation (16th Century) Scripture Alone (Sola Scriptura) Justification by faith, fewer sacraments