



THE BASICS OF THE ORTHODOX FAITH

The Canon of Scripture and Deuterocanonical Books

The formation of the biblical canon—those texts recognized as Holy Scripture—was guided by the Church under the Holy Spirit’s guidance. The councils of the early Church, particularly the Councils of Hippo (393 AD) and Carthage (397 AD), played crucial roles in affirming the canon. The Orthodox Church recognizes the Old and New Testaments, comprising 76 books, as inspired and authoritative.

The formation of the Canon of Holy Scripture was a gradual process that unfolded over several centuries. Here are the key stages involved in the development of the biblical canon, particularly in the context of the Orthodox Church:

1. Early Church Period (1st - 2nd Century)

- **Oral Tradition:** Initially, the teachings of Jesus and the apostles were transmitted orally. Early Christian communities relied on the oral sharing of faith and teachings.
- **Written Works:** As the apostles began to die, the need for written accounts of Jesus’ life and teachings grew. This led to the writing of the Gospels and letters (epistles) attributed to apostles like Paul, Peter, and John.

2. Formation of the New Testament Canon (2nd - 4th Century)

- **Recognition of Texts:** By the late 2nd century, certain texts began to be recognized as authoritative. Writings such as the four Gospels and Pauline epistles were widely circulated and respected.

- **Early Lists:** Church Fathers, such as Irenaeus and Tertullian, referred to specific texts as sacred. They emphasized the importance of apostolic authority in determining canonical status.

3. Councils and Formalization (4th Century)

- **Synods and Councils:** The councils of Hippo (393 AD) and Carthage (397 AD) played significant roles in affirming the canon of Scripture. They confirmed the lists of books that were already widely accepted in the churches.
- **Eastern and Western Traditions:** While the Western Church began to formalize the New Testament canon during these councils, the Eastern Church continued to discuss and evaluate texts, leading to some differences in canon recognition.

4. Final Confirmation (5th Century Onward)

- **Official Recognition:** The canon was further solidified in the following centuries. The 5th century saw the widespread acceptance of the canon as established by earlier councils.
- **Orthodox Tradition:** The Orthodox Church maintains a canon of 76 books, which includes several texts that some Protestant traditions exclude (such as the Deuterocanonical books).

The process of forming the biblical canon was a complex interplay of historical, theological, and ecclesiastical factors. It involved the recognition and affirmation of texts that were believed to be inspired by the Holy Spirit and crucial for the faith and practice of the Christian community. The Orthodox Church's canon reflects this historical development and the continued importance of tradition in interpreting Scripture.

The Orthodox Bible contains a total of **77 (76) books**:

- **Old Testament:** 49 (50) books (including the Deuterocanonical books)

- **New Testament:** 27 books

In contrast, the Protestant Bible consists of **66 books**:

- **Old Testament:** 39 books
- **New Testament:** 27 books

The main difference lies in the Old Testament, where the Orthodox Bible includes additional texts known as the Deuterocanonical books, while the Protestant Bible excludes them.

The Deuterocanonical books, also known as the "Second Canon," are a set of texts included in the Orthodox Bible that are not found in the Protestant Old Testament. These books are recognized for their spiritual and theological significance in the Orthodox tradition. Here is a list of the Deuterocanonical books along with reasons for their inclusion:

List of Deuterocanonical Books

1. Baruch,
2. Letter of Jeremiah,
3. Wisdom of Solomon,
4. Sirach,
5. Judith,
6. Tobit,
7. 2 Ezra,
8. 3 Ezra,
9. 1-3 Maccabees

Reasons for Inclusion in the Orthodox Bible

1. **Historical Usage:** These books were widely used and accepted by the early Christian Church, particularly in the Septuagint, the Greek translation of the Old Testament that was commonly used in the early centuries.
2. **Apostolic Tradition:** The Orthodox Church values the teachings and practices passed down from the apostles. Many of these texts were regarded as beneficial for spiritual growth and moral instruction,

aligning with the tradition of the Church.

3. **Spiritual and Theological Value:** The Deuterocanonical books provide important teachings on faith, ethics, and the nature of God. For example, the **Wisdom of Solomon** offers profound insights into divine wisdom and justice, while **Sirach** emphasizes the importance of living a righteous life.
4. **Liturgical Use:** Many of these texts are used in the liturgical life of the Orthodox Church, particularly during feasts and holy days. Their inclusion in the Scriptures supports the Church's worship and doctrine.
5. **Ecumenical Considerations:** The Orthodox Church maintains its unique tradition while also recognizing the importance of these texts for broader Christian unity and understanding.

The Deuterocanonical books are included in the Orthodox Bible due to their historical acceptance, spiritual significance, and the role they play in the liturgical life of the Church. They are seen as integral to the fullness of divine revelation.