

Module Two

The Seven Books

Unless Someone Guides Me

A standalone session. Run it any time after Session One.

Part One: Leader Preparation Guide

Session Overview

Discovery Aim. The group discovers which books are in dispute, why they were in the Christian Bible for over a thousand years, and what actually happened in the sixteenth century.

Catholic Touchstone. The question is not whether someone added books but which collection the Church received and used. Answering it requires history, and the history is not in Catholics' disfavour.

What You Need to Know

The seven books are Tobit, Judith, Wisdom, Sirach (also called Ecclesiasticus), Baruch, and 1 and 2 Maccabees, together with additional material in Esther and Daniel. Catholics call them deuterocanonical, meaning of the second canon, a term that acknowledges they were discussed rather than pretending they never were.

The early Church read the Old Testament principally in Greek, in the Greek scriptural tradition commonly called the Septuagint, which broadly carried these books alongside the rest. Be precise here: there was no single fixed Septuagint canon. The great Greek Christian codices differ from one another in what they contain and in what order, and some carry books the Catholic canon does not. The claim that holds is transmission and use, not a closed Greek list. The New Testament authors quote the Old Testament in a Greek form very frequently, which tells you which text was in their hands. The regional councils at Hippo in 393 and Carthage in 397 and 419 list a canon matching the Catholic one. These books were then carried in the Latin Bibles of the West for over a millennium, copied, read and preached from as part of Scripture. Say it as continuity of use, not as a fixed table of contents. The Latin transmission was not perfectly uniform; manuscripts and editions differ in where some books were placed and in what else was bound with them, and as noted above several of these books reached the Vulgate through the Old Latin rather than through Jerome's own hand. What is constant, and what the argument needs, is that the West read these books as its Bible until the sixteenth century.

St. Jerome is the honest complication and you should present him fully. He had genuine doubts about books outside the Hebrew canon and said so. He also translated Tobit and Judith himself, quoted these books, and deferred to the Church's usage. The remaining deuterocanonical books entered the Vulgate through the Old Latin rather than his own hand. He is neither a proto-Protestant nor a Tridentine Catholic, and tidying him into either is a sourcing error.

In the sixteenth century Luther's German Bible grouped these books in a separate section, presented as useful and good to read but not held equal to Scripture. He also expressed reservations about several New Testament books, moving Hebrews, James, Jude, and Revelation to the end of his New Testament, and his description of James as an epistle of straw appears in the 1522 preface and was dropped from

later editions. He did not remove James from the Bible, and saying he did is the kind of overclaim that will cost you the argument. The Council of Trent defined the canon in 1546, in response.

Where the Books Show Up

The wicked plot against the righteous man: “let us test him with insult and torture... let us condemn him to a shameful death, for, according to what he says, he will be protected.” **Wisdom 2:12-20**

Set this beside Matthew 27:41-43, where the chief priests mock the crucified Christ with the taunt that he trusts in God and God should deliver him if he wants him. The verbal parallel is close enough that most readers notice it immediately, and it is the single most striking thing you can show a group in this module.

Hebrews 11:35 speaks of women who received their dead by resurrection and of others tortured, refusing release, that they might rise to a better life. No episode in the protocanonical Old Testament matches that description, and it is widely regarded as an allusion to the mother and her seven sons in 2 Maccabees 7. Present it as an allusion rather than a quotation, because that is what it is.

Voices of the Church

Voice of the Church

St. Augustine

On Christian Doctrine, Book II (summary)

Augustine sets out how to judge which books belong, advising that the reader follow the authority of the churches, preferring those held by the greater number and the more weighty. His own enumeration includes the disputed books.

Note his method as much as his list. Faced with a question the Scriptures do not answer about themselves, he consults the practice of the churches.

Summary of his argument in Book II; no section number printed.

Voice of the Church

St. Jerome

Given as a summary of his teaching; no locus printed

Jerome distinguished books of the Hebrew canon from those he described as read for edification but not for establishing doctrine, and he said so bluntly. He also translated Tobit and Judith, cited these books in his own writing, and submitted to the judgment of the Church on their use.

We print him honestly rather than conscripting him. A tradition confident enough to keep a dissenting Doctor in full view is more persuasive than one that hides him.

Voice of the Church

St. Clement of Rome

Letter to the Corinthians (summary)

Writing around the year 96, Clement holds up examples of faithful women from Israel's history, and the figures he reaches for include Judith.

Whatever conclusion one draws about canonicity, the practical point stands: these narratives were part of the furniture of Christian moral instruction in the first century.

Summary; presented as evidence of early use rather than of a formal canon list.

Catechism Connection

- CCC 120 lists the canon in full, including the seven, and states that the Church discerned the list by apostolic Tradition.
- CCC 121-123 treat the enduring value of the Old Testament and warn against dismissing it.
- CCC 138 states that the Church accepts and venerates the forty-six Old Testament and twenty-seven New Testament books as inspired.

Session Goals

- 1. Every participant can name the seven books.
- 2. Every participant can explain, in one sentence, why Trent is late without conceding the argument.
- 3. Every participant can tell St. Jerome's story accurately, including the part that is inconvenient for us.
- 4. Nobody leaves saying Luther removed books from the New Testament, because he did not.

THE OBJECTION BENCH

Leader only. Deploy what the room needs, skip the rest. Do not hand this page out. The matching Take-Home carries a shorter version in the participant's own words.

"The Jews rejected these books, and it is their Old Testament."

Hedge honestly. The Hebrew canon was not formally closed in a way that settles the question during our Lord's lifetime, and the old theory of a decisive rabbinic council at Jamnia is now largely abandoned by scholars.

The Greek-speaking Jewish world used a wider collection, and that is the world the apostles preached in and quoted from. Do not claim more than that.

Do not say the Septuagint had a canon. Say these books were transmitted and read with the Greek Scriptures.

"Trent added them in 1546, which is proof enough."

Concede that Trent, in 1546, gave the first solemn definition of the canon with an anathema attached, and that this is a real fact, not one to hide. But do not concede that Trent was the first time the Church listed these books authoritatively. The ecumenical Council of Florence enumerated the same collection, including the seven, in its 1442 Decree for the Jacobites, a century before Luther. Trent defined; Florence had already listed.

Then give the sequence: Hippo and Carthage in the 390s, the Latin Bible of the West for a millennium, relegation to a separate section in the sixteenth century, and outright omission in many later Protestant editions, definition in response. Trent closed a question that had long been settled in the practice of the Latin Church, in her Bibles, her liturgy and her preaching, and closed it because someone had reopened it. Be honest about the qualifier: settled in practice is not the same as never questioned. A minority of Latin scholars, Jerome most famously, kept raising the Hebrew canon as a difficulty right up to the eve of Trent. What was constant was the use of the books; what Trent supplied was the definition.

Use relegation, not removal. The module has already taught that Luther separated these books rather than deleting them, and your own summary must match.

"2 Maccabees prays for the dead, which is why you kept it."

The order of causation is backwards and worth stating: the book was in the Christian Bible for centuries before anyone was arguing about purgatory in these terms.

Then be honest about what 2 Maccabees 12 shows: Jews in the second century before Christ prayed and made offerings for the dead, and the author commends it. Whether that establishes the later doctrine is a separate question, treated in Book Two.

Part Two: Discussion Guide

Opening Prayer

Father, you gave your Word to a people and let them carry it through centuries of argument and copying and care. Thank you for everyone who kept it. Give us patience with the history and honesty with the facts. Amen.

Win

1. Have you ever read any of the seven books? What do you actually know about them?
2. How does it feel to be told your Bible has extra books in it?

Build

Live discovery. Give half the group Wisdom 2:12-20 and the other half Matthew 27:39-43, without saying why. Ask each to summarise their passage in three sentences. Then read them side by side.

3. What do you notice?

ANSWER (share after the discussion)

The taunt in Matthew tracks the plot in Wisdom closely: the righteous man claims God as his father, is tested with insult, is condemned to a shameful death, and his claim to divine protection is thrown back at him.

Be careful about the claim you make. This is a striking parallel, and the strongest honest statement is that the Passion narrative appears to be shaped by language the evangelists knew from this book. Do not assert direct quotation.

4. Read Hebrews 11:35. Can you find that episode in the Old Testament you already have?

ANSWER (share after the discussion)

No. The description of people tortured and refusing release in hope of a better resurrection has no match in the protocanonical books, and is widely regarded as an allusion to 2 Maccabees 7.

Again, allusion rather than quotation. The honest version is stronger than the overclaim.

5. Given Jerome's doubts, how should a Catholic tell his story?

ANSWER (share after the discussion)

Completely. He doubted, he said so, he translated two of them, he cited them, and he deferred to the Church. Any version that omits half of this is dishonest, including the Catholic version that omits the doubts.

This is the teaching moment of the module: our confidence does not depend on our saints agreeing with us about everything.

DIG DEEPER: What Luther actually did

He grouped the disputed Old Testament books separately as useful and good to read but not equal to Scripture, and he moved Hebrews, James, Jude, and Revelation to the end of his New Testament.

He did not remove any New Testament book. The epistle of straw phrase is from the 1522 preface and was dropped in later editions. Getting this right matters: the accurate account is damaging enough without embellishment.

The Steelman

The strongest form of the objection.

The Old Testament was entrusted to Israel. Paul says the Jews were entrusted with the oracles of God, and the tradition that carried Israel's Scriptures forward never received a single one of these seven. Notice also what the New Testament does not do. It cites the Law, the Prophets and the Psalms constantly and by formula, and it never once cites any of the seven as Scripture. And the appeal to the Greek collections proves too little, because those collections do not agree with one another: the great codices carry different books in different orders, some of them books Rome itself does not accept. A list nobody in the first century could state is not a canon. Christians who later fixed the wider list were not receiving something from Israel; they were settling something Israel had never handed them.

And the doubts were not marginal. Jerome, the greatest scriptural scholar the ancient Church produced, the man who actually translated the Bible the West used, said plainly that these books were read for edification and not for establishing doctrine. If the Church had always been certain, her finest scholar would not have written that.

6. What is true there, and what does it leave standing?

ANSWER (share after the discussion)

True: Romans 3:2 says what it says, Jerome said what he said, and the doubts were real and were held by serious people. Concede all of it. Concede the citation point too. There is no formula quotation of the seven in the New Testament, only allusion, and this module has already refused to overclaim on Wisdom 2 and Hebrews 11:35.

What it leaves standing is a question about which Israel. The Greek-speaking Jewish world used a wider collection, and it is that world the apostles came out of and preached into. Deciding between them is a judgment about which tradition of reception is authoritative, and that judgment is not itself found in any book.

On Jerome: he did not treat his opinion as decisive, and neither should we. He submitted the question to the Church, which is precisely the move this whole course has been describing.

The honest landing: this is not a question Scripture can answer about itself, which is why it is in this course at all.

Send

7. Will you read one of the seven this year? Which one?

8. What does it do to you that the Church kept a dissenting Doctor in plain view?

Live It This Week

- Read the Book of Tobit. It is short, it is a family story, and most Catholics have never read it.

- Read Wisdom 2 and then Matthew 27 in one sitting.
- Learn the seven names well enough to list them without looking.

Closing Prayer

Lord, you spoke through many hands over many centuries, and your Church carried the words to us. Give us love for all of them, and honesty in how we defend them. Through Christ our Lord. Amen.

Memory Verse

▮ *“My son, if you come forward to serve the Lord, prepare yourself for temptation.” Sirach 2:1*

Part Three: Leader Reference Card

- Wisdom 2:12-20, the plot against the righteous man (live discovery)
- Matthew 27:39-43, the taunt at the cross
- Hebrews 11:35, tortured, refusing release
- 2 Maccabees 7, the mother and her seven sons
- 2 Maccabees 12:44-46, prayer and offering for the dead
- Romans 3:2, entrusted with the oracles of God (steelman)
- Sirach 2:1, memory verse
- Tobit, recommended reading

Catechism: CCC 120, 121-123, 138.

Historical: Hippo 393; Carthage 397 and 419; the Vulgate; Luther's 1534 Bible; Florence, Decree for the Jacobites, 1442; Trent, fourth session, 1546.