

Take-Home

The Seven Books

Unless Someone Guides Me

Module Two

What We Found

The seven are Tobit, Judith, Wisdom, Sirach, Baruch, and 1 and 2 Maccabees, with additional material in Esther and Daniel. They circulated with the Greek Scriptures the early Church read, they stand in the canon lists of Hippo and Carthage in the 390s, and they stood in the Latin Bible of the West for over a thousand years.

We read Wisdom 2 beside Matthew 27 and found the taunt at the cross tracking the plot against the righteous man closely: he claims God as father, he is tested with insult, he is condemned to a shameful death, and his trust is thrown back at him.

And we told St. Jerome's story completely rather than conveniently. He doubted these books and said so; he also translated two of them, quoted them, and deferred to the Church's judgment on their use, without ever giving up the distinction.

Voices of the Church

Voice of the Church

St. Augustine

On Christian Doctrine, Book II (summary)

Faced with a question Scripture does not answer about itself, he advises following the authority of the churches, preferring those held by the greater number and the weightier. His own list includes the disputed books.

Voice of the Church

St. Jerome

Given as a summary of his teaching; no locus printed

He distinguished the Hebrew canon from books he described as read for edification rather than for establishing doctrine, and said so bluntly. He also translated Tobit and Judith when bishops asked him for them, and he deferred to the Church's judgment on their use; he never withdrew his own distinction.

Voice of the Church

St. Clement of Rome

Letter to the Corinthians (summary)

Writing around the year 96, he holds up faithful women of Israel's history as examples, and Judith is among those he reaches for.

Ready Response

“The Catholic Church added seven books.” You can give him the chronology without raising your voice, because you now know it in order. Those books circulated with the Greek Scriptures the apostles and the early Church read, they stand in the canon lists of Hippo and Carthage in the 390s, and they stood in the Western Bible for a thousand years before anyone proposed doing without them. Trent defined the canon in 1546 in response to the sixteenth century denial of their canonical status. Say it once, in that order, and let him go and check it.

“Jerome rejected them.” Say yes before he has finished the sentence. Then tell the rest of it, because the rest of it is the best thing you took from this evening: he doubted these books and said so bluntly, he translated Tobit and Judith when bishops asked him for them, he quoted these books, and he deferred to the Church’s judgment on their use without ever giving up his own distinction. Our tradition is large enough to hold a saint who argued with it. You do not have to sand him down to stay Catholic, and the complete story is more persuasive than the tidy one.

“Trent is too late to count.” He is right that Trent is late, and you should be the one to say so; the first dogmatic definition really is sixteenth century. Then set the events beside each other the way you did in session: canon lists in the 390s, a thousand years of use, their demotion out of the canon in the sixteenth century, and only then the definition. A definition arrives when somebody reopens a question. Nobody defines what nobody is disputing.

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.

Memory Verse

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

In the Catechism

CCC 120, 121-123, 138.