

Why I Am Catholic

The "Catholic Books" of the Old Testament.

Every so often a non-Catholic will ask me, "Why does your Bible have more books than mine?" The simple answer is Martin Luther. In the 1520s, as Martin Luther detailed his reasons for leaving the Catholic Church, he claimed that the church was wrong about the Bible. He went back to the Jewish Council of Jamnia (90 AD) which finalized the Jewish canon (authoritative list) of Old Testament books and noted how that council left out the seven books. He decided to take them out without fully understanding why they were left out. Religions and churches at certain times in history codify—make final decisions—about their beliefs and their books. They come together and look at all the books and materials and translations and choose and decide based on certain criteria and core beliefs. The seven books come from a third to first century BC translation of the Old Testament into Greek—known as the Septuagint or Alexandrian canon. The Hebrew translation (Masoretic text or Palestinian canon) does not have these books and has fewer chapters for Daniel and a couple other included books. Many of these books came from Greek-speaking communities (written and preserved within those communities) and would not have been familiar to all Jews. Each community cherishes and preserves different stories and God inspires each community differently (see the differences of the four gospels). By the third century BC, Jews were dispersed (after the Diaspora of 607 BC), and many lived in Greek-speaking countries. Even Jerusalem had many Greek-speaking Jews. By the time of Jesus and the Apostles, both canons—both translations—were in use. The Council of Jamnia met 60 years after Pentecost and the start of Christianity and 20 years after the Temple was destroyed in Jerusalem (70 AD). Judaism was in crisis. Rejecting the Septuagint (Greek translation) "achieved two important ends, namely, the preservation of the Hebrew language at least for religious use (even among the diaspora) and the final separation and distinction between the Jewish and Christian communities." (*Wikipedia*) These seven books cover a variety of topics, some of which would have been uncomfortable to first century Jewish leaders. These include hints about the coming of the Messiah around the time of Jesus, a belief in life after death, and Greek philosophy. 90 AD "was well after authority had passed from the Jews to the Church (Acts 4:19). Ironically it was at the Council of Jamnia that the Jews also rejected the New Testament." (*StayCatholic.com, Farna*) "Most Church Fathers regarded the Septuagint as the standard form of the Old Testament. When the Councils of Hippo (393 AD) and Carthage (397 AD) set the canon of the New Testament they also confirmed the Septuagint as the Old Testament. Further evidence of the Septuagint's acceptance by the early Church can be found in the New Testament itself. It quotes the Old Testament approximately 350 times. Three hundred of those quotes are from the Septuagint." (*Farna*) These books are also "canonized" at the Council of Trent in the 1500s. The seven "Catholic books" are: Tobit, Judith, Wisdom, Sirach, Baruch and 1 and 2 Maccabees. These are part of the *Apocrypha* in the King James Bible and for Episcopalians and Lutherans. For Catholics they are divinely inspired and part of what Jesus gave to His Church.