

***Is My Bible Reliable?***  
**Cornerstone Community Church**  
**Winter of 2021**  
Tony Slavin

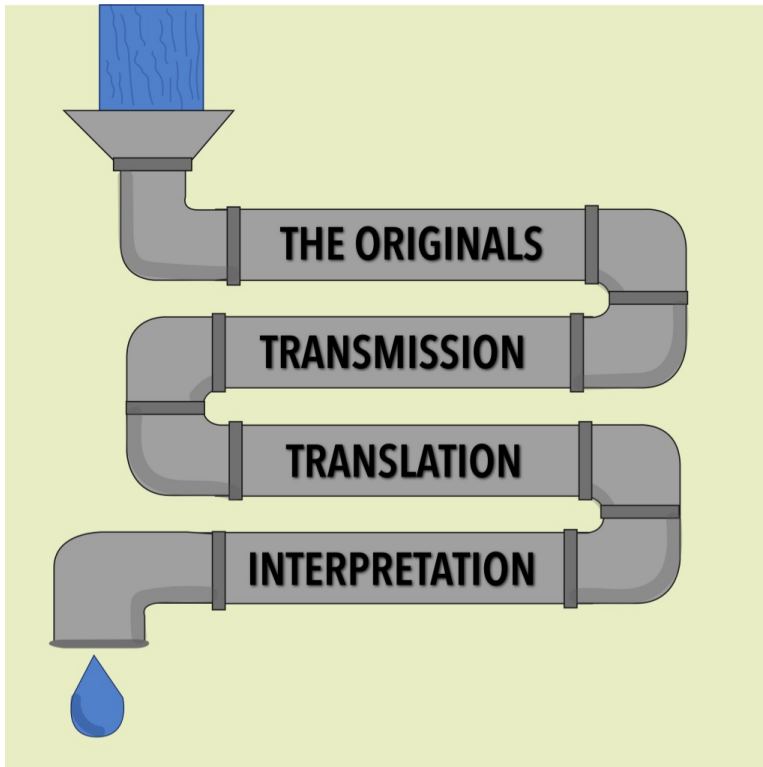
**Recommended Books**

Ewert, David. *A General Introduction to the Bible: From Ancient Tablets to Modern Translations*. Grand Rapids, Mich.: Academie Books/Zondervan, 1990.

Wegner, Paul D. *The Journey from Texts to Translations: The Origin and Development of the Bible*. Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Academic, 2004, 1999.

Porter, Stanley E. *How We Got the New Testament: Text, Transmission, Translation*. Acadia Studies in Bible and Theology. Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Academic, a division of Baker Publishing Group, 2013.

**I. The Piping Illustration**



This illustration allows us to evaluate whether or not any pollution has entered into the flow of God's Word from the time He revealed Himself to the biblical authors to the translations we hold in our hands.

A. ***The Spring Water*** represents God's revelation to the biblical authors. Our presupposition is that this revelation was without error (i.e., pollution).

B. **The Originals** are the first written manuscript produced by the biblical authors. The technical term *autographs*. We believe that these documents contained exactly what God wanted written down and were also without error. These autographs do not exist any longer, they have been lost, worn out, or destroyed.

*Discussion Question: Why do you suppose God did not preserve these manuscripts?*

C. **The Copies.** The autographs were copied over and over again throughout the centuries. We will ask the question “*were they copied accurately?*”

D. **The Translations.** The Bible has been translated, in whole or part, into a couple thousand languages. In English alone, we have dozens of translations. *Has it been done accurately?*

F. **Our Interpretation** is the last section of piping. How much pollution enters into the way we interpret and apply the Bible?

## II. 2 Timothy 3:14-17 the Piping Illustration

Cornerstone’s Doctrinal Statement regarding Scripture:

*We believe that God has revealed Himself in creation, in the Holy Scripture, and in Jesus Christ, who is the apex of His revelation to mankind. We affirm that all sixty-six books of the Bible are inerrant and infallible in the original manuscripts and they are divinely authoritative in all they affirm. They cannot be added to, subtracted from, or superseded in any regard. The Bible is the ultimate source of all doctrine, instruction, correction, reproof and training in righteousness. The end goal of the Scriptures is to have communion with God, to give wisdom for eternal life, and to equip believers for good works. (Ps 19; John 17:17; 1 Cor. 2:13; 2 Tim. 3:14-17; Heb. 1:1-3; 2 Pet. 1:20-21)*

I agree wholeheartedly with this statement, but I am suggesting in this class that 2 Timothy 3 is not talking about the “original manuscripts” but rather the Bible that Timothy had in his hands. Timothy spoke Greek. His Bible was a **Greek translation** of **Hebrew copies** of the **original manuscripts**. These are “holy writings” he was raised on and which are called “God breathed” by Paul.

### **III The Difference Between Our Bibles and the Originals**

*Question: How are the Bibles in your hands different from the ones that the early Church possessed?*

#### **Theirs**

#### **Ours**

Languages:

Materials:

Format:

Manufacturing:

### **IV The Original Languages of the Bible**

#### ***A The Old Testament***

Hebrew was the primary language of the people of Israel for both speaking and writing up until the time of exile to Babylon. In the exile, Aramaic also became a common language of use because it was the language of the Babylonians. The entire OT was written in Hebrew except for portions of Daniel and Esther, which were written in Aramaic.

#### ***B The New Testament***

Even though 1<sup>st</sup> century Palestinian Jews spoke Aramaic as their first language, all citizens of the Eastern Mediterranean spoke Greek (The Western Mediterranean spoke Latin as their first language). This was due to the conquest of Alexander the Great and his determination to spread the Greek culture and language (known as **Hellenism**) through his conquered lands. Alexander conquered all the lands from Greece to the border of India. In God's great providence He chose to have the NT written in the language that much of the civilized world spoke; i.e., **Greek**.

### **V The Original Writing Materials of the Bible**

#### ***A On Papyrus and Vellum***

**Papyrus** was made from reeds that grew in the Egyptian Nile valley. They were processed into a crude paper that could be used for writing. Like our paper today though it was vulnerable to decay from moisture. The only papyrus manuscripts that we have discovered today were found in the dry, sandy climate of Egypt. But don't think that only Egyptians used papyrus, it was exported all over the world. They simply did not survive for our benefit today.

Due to the expense and to politically volatile mood of the Egyptians, there came a need for a more readily available source of writing material. **Vellum** (also called **parchment**) was developed into the common material for writing. Vellum is made of animal skins that had been properly prepared to be used for writing material. They were more available than papyrus and they could be written on both sides. They also could be erased and written over (called a **Palimpsest**). Many of our NT manuscripts are of this nature. The overwhelming majority of extant manuscripts for the NT are written on vellum.

## **B From Scrolls to Codex's**

The first form of our Bibles was in the form of a **scroll**. The Papyri were rolled from both ends so that a person could “scroll” from the beginning of the document to the end. One end would be unrolled as the reader read and then he would roll it back up with the other hand. This allowed for not having a long scroll unrolled all over the ground. Some scrolls were quite lengthy since they would sew pages of papyrus or vellum together from end to end. The problem with this format was that you could not have multiple books together. This called for another format.



The **codex** (Latin for book) form was like our modern day books. Multiple sheets of vellum were bound together so that you could read it like a book. The two most famous manuscripts of the NT (***Sinaiticus*** identified with the siglum **Σ**, and ***Vaticanus*** identified with the siglum **B**) are bound in codex form. This method of book making was common until the printing press was invented. An interesting fact is that the Christians preferred the use of the Codex over the use of scrolls. More on that later.

## VI      The Divisions of the Bible

### *A      The Old Testament*

#### **1      The Number of Books**

Our Old Testaments have 39 books but the Hebrew Bible had only 24 books or according to some lists only 22 books. **But we both possess the exact same writings.** In other words, everything in the Hebrew Bible is in our today. See the chart below for how these books were combined together to form the 22/24 book canon. The 24 book canon listed below was arranged as a 22 book canon by combining Lamentations with Jeremiah and putting Ruth with Judges.

#### **2      The Arrangement of Books**

This arrangement developed over time as you would expect. There came to be a **three fold division** by the time of the 1<sup>st</sup> century.<sup>1</sup> In the chart below, the Hebrew words for **Law**, **Prophets**, and **Writings** are respectively **Torah**, **Nevi'im** and **Kethuvim**. The first letter of each word (**t, n, k**) came to be used as the acronym **tanak** or **tanach**. which is a common term for the Hebrew Bible.

#### THE HEBREW OLD TESTAMENT ARRANGEMENT<sup>1</sup>

<u>The Law</u> (Torah)	<u>The Prophets</u> (Nevi'im)	<u>The Writings</u> (Kethuvim)
1. Genesis	A. Former Prophets	A. Poetical Books
2. Exodus	1. Joshua	1. Psalms
3. Leviticus	2. Judges	2. Job
4. Numbers	3. Samuel	3. Proverbs
5. Deuteronomy	4. Kings	
	B. Latter Prophets	B. Five Rolls (Megilloth)
	1. Isaiah	1. Ruth
	2. Jeremiah	2. Song of Songs
	3. Ezekiel	3. Ecclesiastes
	4. The Twelve	4. Lamentations
		5. Esther

<sup>1</sup> See F.F. Bruce, **The Canon of Scripture** for specifics of this development.

<sup>1</sup>These two charts were taken from Geisler, Normal L., and Nix, William E., **A General Introduction to the Bible, Revised and Expanded**, (Chicago, IL: Moody Press, 1986) :pgs 23-25.

- C. Historical Books
  - 1. Daniel
  - 2. Ezra-Nehemiah
  - 3. Chronicles

### The 39 Book Structure of Modern Protestant Bibles

#### **The Law (Pentateuch)—5 books**

1. Genesis
2. Exodus
3. Leviticus
4. Numbers
5. Deuteronomy

#### **Poetry—5 books**

1. Job
2. Psalms
3. Proverbs
4. Ecclesiastes
5. Song of Solomon

#### **History—12 books**

1. Joshua
2. Judges
3. Ruth
4. 1 Samuel
5. 2 Samuel
6. 1 Kings
7. 2 Kings
8. 1 Chronicles
9. 2 Chronicles
10. Ezra
11. Nehemiah
12. Esther

#### **Prophets—17 Books**

##### ***Major***

1. Isaiah
2. Jeremiah
3. Lamentations
4. Ezekiel
5. Daniel

##### ***Minor***

1. Hosea
2. Joel
3. Amos
4. Obadiah
5. Jonah
6. Micah
7. Nahum
8. Habakkuk
9. Zephaniah
10. Haggai
11. Zechariah
12. Malachi

For further reading obtain the book by Roger Beckwith listed in the footnotes and consult Geisler and Nix's book **A General Introduction To The Bible**.

### ***B The New Testament***

The early Christian Fathers collected the books of the New Testament. These were classified in four groups: Gospels (four books), History (one book), Epistles (twenty-one books), and Prophecy/Apocalypse (one book). The Epistles can be broken up into two groups, Paul's epistles (13) and the General or Catholic Epistles (8). Regarding the Epistles, there has always been an argument as to whether or not Paul wrote 13 or 14 letters (with Hebrews being the 14<sup>th</sup>). In this class we will consider Hebrews as non-Pauline and keep it with the General Epistles.

## VII The Old Testament Canon

### ***A The Closing of the OT Canon***

The word “Canon” does not refer to the massive gun that shoots large metal balls (that is spelled “cannon”). It is a word that comes from Greek that means “to measure.” So, we use the word to ask the question “*which books measure up to the standard of being in God’s Word.*”

Evangelicals and Jews traditionally argue that the OT Canon was closed at least 200-400 years before Christ. Some who disagree would say that the canon did not close till after Christ (e.g. the Council of Jamnia, cir. A.D. 90) or it did not close at all. We will not take the time to go into the details of the arguments for a closed canon, but you can read about this in either Ewert’s and Wegner’s book mentioned above.

My position is that God revealed His word to the Jewish people and they are the ones that He used to determine the limits of His canon

#### → **Romans 3:2**

This passage tells us the Jews had an advantage in the history of salvation due to the fact that they were God’s chosen instruments through whom the Scriptures (what we call the OT) would come. So it seems that their view of the canon should hold a great deal of weight.

**Rom. 3:1** ¶ Then what advantage has the Jew? Or what is the benefit of circumcision?

**Rom. 3:2** Great in every respect. First of all, they were entrusted with the oracles of God.

#### → **The Ceasing of the OT Prophets**

There was a strong belief in the Intertestamental time (approx. 400 B.C. – early 1 century AD) that God was not longer speaking through prophets. Prophets were essential for there to be written revelation as the quote from Josephus below shows.

#### **Josephus, Against Apion, 1:7-8** (AD 93-95)

. . . because every one is not permitted of his own accord to be a writer, nor is there any disagreement in what is written; *they being only prophets that have written the original and earliest accounts of things as they learned them of God himself by inspiration*; and others have written what hath happened in their own times, and that in a very distinct manner also. 8. For we have not an innumerable multitude of books among us, disagreeing from and contradicting one another, [as the Greeks have,] but only twenty-two books, (8) which contain the records of all the past times; which are justly believed to be divine; and of them five belong to Moses, which contain his laws and the traditions of the origin of mankind till his death. This interval of time was little short of three thousand years; *but as to the time from the death of Moses till the reign of Artaxerxes king of Persia, who reigned after Xerxes, the prophets, who were after Moses, wrote down what was done in their times in thirteen books.* The remaining four books contain hymns to God, and precepts for the conduct of human life. *It is true, our history hath been written since Artaxerxes very particularly, but hath not been esteemed of the like authority with the former by our forefathers, because there hath not been an exact succession of prophets since that time;* (emphasis mine)

**I want to make a few points from the emphasized portions.**

- Only prophets were used to communicate God's revelation in writing.
- No more revelation was given after the period of Artaxerxes who was the King during the period of Nehemiah and Ezra (also Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi). **This dates to approx 400 BC<sup>6</sup>**
- The reason revelation stopped then was because God seems to have ceased to send prophets to Israel.

This conclusion is supported by other intertestamental literature, see 1 Maccabees 4:45-46 & 9:27. Both of these passages give us an insight into the belief that God had stopped speaking authoritatively through prophets. Evidently, the ceasing of God's voice had caused great distress among his people. *This also gives us great insight into the early chapters of the Gospel as to why there was so much excitement when John the Baptist arrived on the scene.*

**B. The New Testament Evidence**

The New Testament writers use the noun **graphie** (γραφή) to refer to scripture (50 times). While the word can simply mean "writings" without any reference to inspiration, the NT almost exclusively uses it to refer to the "divine" writings, which we translate as "Scripture." The NT, on 67 occasions, also uses the verbal form *gegraptai* (perfect passive indicative 3<sup>RD</sup> person singular from *graphō* [γραφῶ,]) to authoritatively refer to specific passages of Scripture (translated as "*it is written*"). **The authoritative weight given to these terms implies strongly that what constituted Scripture was agreed upon by the writers and their audiences.**

Jesus opened his ministry with the reading of Scripture (Luke 4:18) and closed his ministry with direct references to Scriptures being fulfilled (Luke 24:25-27, 45-46). It is interesting that the Gospel writers do not stop to define which books these Scriptures were referring to. In fact, there is never any argument over what actually constituted Scripture. This lends great weight to the thesis that there was already an agreed upon number of specific books that were called Scripture, thus concluding that the canon was closed by Jesus time is a reasonable conclusion. As we saw last week, his reference in Matt. 23:35 to Zechariah's murder strongly implies that 2 Chronicles was the last book of the Canon.

**C. The Argument by the Rabbi's about which books belong and do not belong.**

Rabbis after the time of Jesus did argue about the validity of certain books, as to whether or not they belonged in the Canon. Let's discuss these books.

There are two Greek terms that need explanation: **Antilegomena** (ἀντιλεγόμενα) and **Homologoumena** (ὁμολεγόμενα)

<b>Antilegomena</b> means " <i>disputed</i> " or " <i>spoken against</i> "
<b>Homologoumena</b> means " <i>agreed upon</i> "

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<sup>6</sup>See the article *Artaxerxes* in **Zondervan's Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible**, vol 1.



Of the 39 OT books, 34 are part of the *Homolegoumena*, that is, they were never disputed by the Rabbis. But 5 of these books were disputed, and they are referred to as the OT *Antilegomena*.

### **Song of Solomon**

The basic reason that this book was challenged is that it seemed *sensual* to some. The school of Shammai (first cent. A.D.) expressed doubt about its canonicity, but eventually the view of Rabbi Akiba ben Joseph (c. 50-132) prevailed, when he said,

God forbid! No man in Israel ever disputed about the Song of Songs [that he should say] that it does not render the hands unclean [i.e., is not canonical], for all the ages are not worth the day on which the Song of Songs was given to Israel; for all the Writings are holy, but the Song of Songs is the Holy of Holies. And if aught was in dispute the dispute was about Ecclesiastes alone.<sup>10</sup>

**Ecclesiastes** One of the main objections to this book was that it seemed *skeptical*. Some have called it the “Song of Skepticism.” However, there is no necessity to come to that conclusion about the book. Ecclesiastes itself comes to a spiritual conclusion: “Fear God and keep His commandments; because this applies to every person” (12:13).

**Esther** Because of the conspicuous *absence of the name of God (YHWH)*, this book encountered some difficulty in retaining its position in the Hebrew canon. The basis of challenge lay in the fact that the book seemed to be *unspiritual*. The primary question asked was: How can the book be God’s Word when it does not even mention God’s name? In any event, the absence of God’s name is more than compensated for by the presence of His power and grace in the deliverance of His people, a fact which gives canonical worth to the book (cf. Esther 4:14; 9:20–22).

**Ezekiel** This book was questioned by some because of its apparent *anti-Mosaic* teachings. The school of Shammai thought that the teaching of the book was not in harmony with the Mosaic law, and that the first ten chapters exhibited a tendency toward gnosticism. However, no specific examples have been supplied that do in fact contradict the Torah. If there were actual contradictions, then of course the book could not be considered canonical. Hence, as in the case of the other disputed books, the arguments were centered about interpretation rather than inspiration.

One of the possible contradictions with the Pentateuch was Ezekiel’s New Temple. Observe F.F. Bruce’s comments on Ezekiel. “*As for Ezekiel, the prescriptions in its closing chapters for the New Temple and its services could with difficulty be made to agree with those in the Pentateuch, and the chariot vision of chapter 1 gave rise to mystical speculations and exercises which some Rabbis believed to be spiritually dangerous.*”<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>10</sup>*The Mishnah*, trans. Herbert Danby, Yadaim 3.5, pp. 178-82

<sup>18</sup>Bruce, *The Canon of Scripture*, 35.

***Proverbs*** The disputation over this book was based on the grounds that it is *illogical* (contradictory within itself). The supposed contradiction is found in Proverbs 26:4-5, where the exhortation is both to answer a fool according to his folly and not to do so. However, as the rabbis have observed, the obvious meaning intended is that there are occasions when a fool should be answered and others when he should not. Because the statements are in successive verses and in couplet form, it would appear that they carry an implicit impact similar to the current expression, “On the one hand—and on the other hand.” In any event, the remainder of the verses give different reasons for the two kinds of advice, respectively; and, as a result, there is no contradiction to stand in the way of canonicity.

## ***D The Apocrypha***

### **1 Definition of the term “Apocrypha”**

Coming from the Greek word *apokryphos* (which means hidden), this term was first applied to literature that was considered too sacred for the common eyes and could only be read by the initiate. From there the word came to be used for books of a heretical nature. This shift was due to the fact that the uninitiated could not read them, therefore there must be something wrong with them. Finally the word came to refer to those books that were non-canonical without any necessary reference to heresy.<sup>22</sup>

### **2 The Contents of the Apocrypha**

The name apocrypha usually applies to the following books:

The Book of Tobit
The book of Judith
1 <sup>st</sup> Maccabees
2 <sup>nd</sup> Maccabees
The Wisdom of Solomon
Ecclesiasticus (or The Wisdom of Yeshua, the Son of Sirach)
The book of Baruch
The Additions to Esther
The Prayer of Azariah and the Song of the Three Young Men (inserted between Dan. 3:24-25)
Susanna (Daniel 13)
Bel and the Dragon (Daniel 14)
1 <sup>st</sup> Esdras
2 <sup>nd</sup> Esdras
The letter of Jeremiah (Sometimes included as Chapter 6 of Baruch)
The Prayer of Manasseh

There are many other books that were written during the intertestamental period. Those are commonly called the Pseudepigrapha. See the book by Ewert (page 81) for a list of these writings.

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<sup>22</sup>R.K. Harrison, *The Zondervan Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible*, Vol, 1. Page 205.

### 3 Why the Confusion with the Hebrew Canon

We find in the first 4 centuries of the Christian Church that some prominent believers held some of these apocryphal books as canonical. They overstepped their bounds in doing so. As is stated below, the Hebrew Canon never included them as inspired. The confusion comes with the **Septuagint** (commonly called the **LXX**).

The LXX was the Greek translation of the Old Testament. It was translated over a period of approximately 150 years (250 -100 BC) for the Hellenistic Jews who had lost the ability to speak Hebrew. We will discuss the LXX in more detail later in the class. But for now, it is important to understand that the Apocryphal books gained their prominence through this translation. Most of the Apocrypha was composed in Hebrew or Aramaic and needed translating also. So they were translated during this same time period. Since the Apocrypha's scrolls were stored along side the Canonical writings, there were naturally included with them when they were bound in codex form. Some in the early Church, not the Jews, elevated the status of these writings to Scripture as illustrated by R.K. Harrison;

... it seems clear that they [i.e. the Apocrypha] were used for instructing believers in the early Christian period. First Clement (d. A.D. 95) included quotations from the Wisdom of Solomon, while Polycarp of Smyrna (d. c. A.D. 156) quoted from Tobit. Tertullian (d. c. A.D. 225) and Irenaeus (d. c. A.D. 200) cited certain books of the LXX canon as scriptural and were followed in this by Clement of Alexandria, Origen, and Cyprian in the 3<sup>rd</sup> Century A.D. Jerome (d. A.D. 420) declared as apocryphal all those writings which stood outside the Hebrew Canon, but in his Vulgate versions he included them according to Church practice, though not without some reservations. Jerome and Cyril of Jerusalem (d. A.D. 386) were the first to use the term "apocrypha" for the excess of the LXX over the Hebrew Canon. In his earlier writings Augustine (d. A.D. 430) accepted the traditional Church view that the Apocrypha was canonical, but later he admitted to a difference between the Heb. Canon and the "outside books." Thus in the Early Church the degree in which the Hebrew Canon was esteemed determined the attitude adopted toward the Apocrypha."<sup>23</sup>

Beckwith, in chapter 8 of his book The Old Testament Canon of the New Testament Church, asserts that those of the early Church who were geographically closer to Palestine and Syria or who knew Hebrew rejected the expanded Canon of the LXX. The converse is true, those further removed from Palestine and had no knowledge of Hebrew tended to accept the LXX additions.

### 4 Why it was excluded from the Hebrew Canon

***The Jews never considered any of these books as canonical.*** Even the Roman Catholic Church will admit that their acceptance into the Canon was the result of the Church's acceptance of them and not Israel's. The reason goes back to a point made previous in these notes; God had ceased speaking authoritatively through the prophets. This is why some call the intertestamental period the "Silent Years." ***It is interesting to note that Jesus and the NT writers never even quote the Apocrypha.***<sup>24</sup> Likewise, other first century Jewish writers like Philo and Josephus never quote the Apocrypha as Scripture.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>23</sup>R.K. Harrison, 205.

<sup>24</sup>Bruce Metzger, "Introduction To the Apocrypha" in The Oxford Annotated Apocrypha (New York: Oxford University Press, 1977) :xiv

<sup>25</sup>Bruce, The Canon of Scripture, 46; and David G. Dunbar, "The Canon of Scripture" in

## 5 The Catholic Church's View of the Apocrypha

The Roman Catholic Church officially canonized 7 books and 4 additions from the Apocrypha to the Hebrew Canon in 1546 during the 4<sup>th</sup> session of the Council of Trent. Trent was a Counter Reformation council whose purpose was to correct the errors of the Reformers. The additions are as follows:

The Book of Tobit  
The book of Judith  
1<sup>st</sup> Maccabees  
2<sup>nd</sup> Maccabees  
The Wisdom of Solomon  
Ecclesiasticus (or The Wisdom of Yeshua, the Son of Sirach)  
The Book of Baruch  
The Additions to Esther  
The Prayer of Azariah and the Song of the Three Young Men (inserted between Dan. 3:24&25)  
Susanna (Daniel 13)  
Bel and the Dragon (Daniel 14)

After listing the Old (with these additions) and the NT books, the synod stated the following; ***“But if anyone receive not, as sacred and canonical, the said books entire with all their parts, as they have been used to be read in the Catholic Church, and as they are contained in the old Latin Vulgate edition; and knowingly and deliberately condemn the traditions aforesaid; let him be anathema.”***<sup>26</sup>

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Hermeneutics, Authority, and Canon. Ed. By D.A. Carson and John D. Woodbridge, (Grand Rapids, Zondervan, 1986) :305

<sup>26</sup>Phillip Schaff, The Creeds of Christendom, vol 2, The Greek and Latin Creeds. (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1983) : 81-82.

