

## **How many books are in the Old and New Testaments?**

Let's first look at the Old Testament. Originally the Israelites, the Jewish people, recorded scripture in Hebrew. As a Jewish community developed in Alexandria, there was a need to translate the Hebrew Scripture into Greek for the people to use and study. 70 Greek scholars set out to accomplish this task and all 70 came up with similar translations, each with 46 separate books. Copies of the scripture in Hebrew, however, were in common use that contained only 39 books. At the time of Jesus, both sets of books were commonly used, and both were accepted. Since the early Christian Church was composed primarily of people who spoke Greek (the New Testament was written in Greek), the Greek version of the Old Testament, with 46 books, was used by the Church without question until the Protestant Reformation. The Protestants, rebelling against the authority of the Church, insisted on returning to the Hebrew Scripture and dropped seven books from the Old Testament that we as Catholics retain: 1 & 2 Maccabees, Judith, Tobit, Baruch, Sirach, and the Wisdom of Solomon.

The New Testament slowly evolved over the first four centuries of the Church. There were originally 13 gospels and many letters that were circulating in the early years. The Church, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, had to decide which ones were true and inspired by God. On Easter of the year 367, St. Athanasius, Bishop of Alexandria, issued a festal letter that listed 27 approved books. Over the next 50 years, subsequent Church Councils ratified and accepted this list which gave birth to what we now call the New Testament.

46 book in the Old Testament and 27 books in the New Testament gives us 73 books in the Catholic Bible; the Protestant Bible has 66 (39 + 27).

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