

## NOT ALL BIBLES EQUAL IN SIZE

If you think all Bibles are about the same size, check again. We're not talking about the size of the pages or the thickness of the binding here. What we're talking about is how much stuff there is in a Bible. Not all Bibles are the same size.

Some are longer; some are shorter. Take the standard, middle-of-the-road so-called "Protestant" Bible for example. It has sixty-six books, starting with Genesis and ending with Revelation. Thirty-nine books make up the Old Testament; twenty-seven are in the New Testament.

The Old Testament, as Christians call that collection, is really a product of the Jewish community. These documents were originally written in the Hebrew language (with a few chapters in Aramaic) and contain the religious traditions of the Israelite people.

The New Testament is a collection of documents from the early Christian communities which were originally written in the common Greek language of their day.

But now we're getting ahead of the story. Jewish people today would not think of calling their writings the "old" anything. And who could blame them? For their traditions are quite complete without any extras added to the Hebrew scriptures.

Consequently Jewish editions of the Bible are shorter than Protestant editions. The Jewish scriptures include five books of "the Law," eight books called "the Prophets," and about a dozen others which come under the heading of "the Writings."

Now the story gets a little more complicated. A couple of centuries before the Christian era those Hebrew scriptures were translated into Greek. Eventually the Greek translation, which is now called the "Septuagint," contained more books than the standard Hebrew editions.

For many years it was used by Jews who lived outside Palestine and who spoke Greek in their everyday life and worship.

The Septuagint was the Bible used by some of the early followers of Jesus. But after it had been taken over by the church, and after the Christian and the Jewish communities parted ways, the rabbis chose to accept the Hebrew writings exclusively.

Consequently those extra books circulating in the Greek Septuagint were preserved primarily in Christian circles.

Throughout the centuries Christian scribes copied the biblical documents and translated them into Latin and other European languages. Those extra Greek writings in the Old Testament came to be known as the "apocryphal" books and were included in all Bibles.

It wasn't until the 16<sup>th</sup> century Protestant Reformation that publishers began to separate the apocryphal books from the other Old Testament books.

In most Protestant editions the apocryphal books were included as a separate group between the Old Testament and the New. Eventually they were dropped altogether from Protestant editions of the Bible, especially those in English.

However, they were never dropped from Roman Catholic and Eastern Orthodox editions. Nor are they separated into a special collection. Rather, they remain intermingled among the other Old Testament books.

As a result, Roman Catholic and Eastern Orthodox Bibles are longer by a dozen or so books than most Protestant Bibles.

And that's why not all Bibles are the same size. Jewish Bibles, with only the traditional Hebrew writings, are shortest.

Protestant Bibles, which contain the Hebrew writings plus the Christian New Testament, are in the middle.

And Catholic and Orthodox Bibles are longest because they include most of the apocryphal books in their Old Testaments together with the standard New Testament books.