

Purgatory is Biblical

Within a week, I heard Christian leaders once on Facebook and once on YouTube say that Purgatory is not biblical. That is a statement on very shaky legs both biblically and historically. Here is some of the evidence:

How the bible we hold in our hands today came to be

At the time of Jesus and at the time the Gospels were being written, even the Hebrew Bible canon had not been established: that is, the list of writings to be included and the writings to be excluded for use in synagogue.

The same was true in the very early centuries of Christianity, since not much could be built while the threat of deadly persecution loomed. Believers copied Paul's letters and shared them, ditto with the Gospels and other writings considered worthy of preserving and leaving as legacy for new generations of believers. Neither was it a quick process, it took several councils of gathered bishops to pray seek the guidance of the Holy Spirit and debate, sometimes ferociously, especially in the 382 AD Council of Rome, 393 AD Council of Hippo, 397 AD Council of Carthage and 419 Council of Carthage. Note that all this took place well after Constantine's death in 337 AD.

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Development_of_the_New_Testament_canon

It was the Church that gave birth to the Bible; the Church founded by Jesus upon Peter and his successors.

That is why 1 Tim 3:15b says, looking at the transliterated Greek, *"God's household, which is the Church of the living God, the pillar and foundation of the truth"*, also *"support and basis of the truth"*. It does not say that the bible is the pillar and foundation of the truth.

Not everything the early Christians did and taught got written about in the New Testament, but it did get passed down through the teaching of the apostles and through how Jesus had taught them to live their lives and how Jesus had taught them to worship and minister. Usually only disputed matters got into St Paul's letters, and the stuff that was taken for granted wasn't written about. That's why we have St Paul write in Phil 4:9, *"Whatever you have learned or received or heard or seen in me, put into practice. And the God of peace will be with you."*

Even today we don't write rubrics about how to take up a collection. It is part of normal practice and what is automatic and generally accepted becomes like wallpaper: always present and not debated about. No one is going to write rubrics about how to sing Happy Birthday either.

That Church founded by Jesus upon Peter also did the monumental work of copying the Old Testament, the New Testament and the early Christian writings by hand. Consider how

painstaking that work was, and how much each generation valued the Word of God to preserve it to generations yet to come. All of that reverence for the Word of God and faithful perseverance enabled you to hold a bible in your hands today. Hand copying only began to cease with the advent of the printing press around 1440, which is still pre Reformation.

Every time you pick up a bible you are saying that the Catholic Church got it right at least once in the discernment of the canon of scripture.

The Septuagint and the two books of Maccabees

Remember that Galilee was a mix of Hebrews, Greeks and others. Even the names of the apostles show this fusion. Andrew and Philip are Greek names. Bartholomew is a bit of both with the Ptolemy part being Greek. Matthew is a Greek form of a Hebrew name.

The Septuagint is the earliest extant Greek translation of the Old Testament from the original Hebrew. Within that translation are seven books of the Bible written in Greek, of which Hebrew versions have yet to be found, and are called Apocrypha. Yet these seven books have had an impact on Jewish faith and practice, and Jesus Himself quoted deeply from them, and so did the New Testament writers.

Investigate for yourself and compare these New Testament references with the Apocrypha.

<http://www.cin.org/users/james/files/deutero3.htm>

For example, compare Sirach/Ecclesiasticus 7:32-36

*“And also give generously to the poor, so that your blessing may lack nothing.
Let your generosity extend to all the living, do not withhold it even from the dead.
Do not turn your back on those who weep, but share the grief of the grief-stricken.
Do not shrink from visiting the sick; in this way you will make yourself loved.
In everything you do, remember your end, and you will never sin.”*

With Matthew 25:35-36

“For I was hungry and you gave Me food, I was thirsty and you gave Me drink, I was a stranger and you made Me welcome, lacking clothes and you clothed Me, sick and you visited Me, in prison and you came to see Me.”

You can find these seven books for free at <https://www.catholic.org/bible/> if you scroll down far enough.

There are passages from Esther and Daniel that are classed as Apocrypha.

Then the seven books are Tobit, Judith, Wisdom, Ecclesiasticus, Baruch, 1 and 2 Maccabees.

The two books of Maccabees chronicle the era 176 BC till 134 BC, and the struggles and battles and miracles the people of Israel experienced. It was from this era that the beloved celebration of Hannukah arose. Jesus would have celebrated it every year.

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Books_of_the_Maccabees

But for the current discussion, 2 Maccabees 12, and especially verse 45 are important.

In the beginning of chapter 12 of 2 Maccabees, we hear of successful attacks and retaliations and battles led by Judas Maccabeus and his troops full of faith in the living God. Then they had a battle where some of them lost their lives, which was unusual. Since the next day was the sabbath, they kept that holy, and on the next day went out to recover the bodies of the dead for burial. Everyone who had died had hidden amulets of idols taken as booty from their enemies under their clothes, an affront to God who says: 'You shall have no other gods but Me'. Everyone without those amulets was still alive. Immediately the survivors gave themselves to prayer begging God to forgive the sin of their companions. Then a voluntary collection was taken up and sent to Jerusalem so that sacrifices for sin could be offered on behalf of these deceased.

"An altogether fine and noble action, in which he took full account of the resurrection. For if he had not expected the fallen to rise again it would have been superfluous and foolish to pray for the dead, whereas if he had in view the splendid recompense reserved for those who make a pious end, the thought was holy and devout. This was why he had this atonement sacrifice offered for the dead, so that they might be released from their sin." 2 Macc 12:43b-45

Given how readily the troops offered contributions to the collection, this cannot have been an original thought, but an existing understanding that sacrifices for sin could be offered both for the living and for the dead, and that it was an legitimate thing to do.

Our Jewish brothers and sisters still pray for the dead

This is an account of modern Jewish practice:

<https://coffeeshoprabbi.com/2017/06/23/what-is-the-jewish-prayer-for-the-dead/>

"God, full of mercy, who dwells in the heights, provide a sure rest upon the wings of the Divine Presence, within the range of the holy, pure and glorious, whose shining resemble the sky's, to the soul of (Hebrew name of deceased) son of (Hebrew name of his father) for a charity was given to the memory of his soul. Therefore, the Master of Mercy will protect him forever, from behind the hiding of His wings, and will tie his soul with the rope of life. The Everlasting is his heritage, and he shall rest peacefully upon his lying place, and let us say: Amen."

This is the prayer prayed out loud when sitting Shiva, and everyone responds, Amen.

It is also used with other ritual practices for mourning, and this is a direct correlation with that excerpt from 2 Maccabees 12 - only more than 2150 years later.

Now compare that prayer with the memento for the dead found in the major Eucharistic prayers in Catholic practice:

Eucharistic Prayer I: Remember also, Lord, Your servants N. and N.

who have gone before us with the sign of faith and rest in the sleep of peace.

Grant them, O Lord, we pray, and all who sleep in Christ,
a place of refreshment, light and peace.

Eucharistic Prayer II: Remember Your servant N.
whom You have called from this world to Yourself.
Grant that he (she) who was united with Your Son in a death like His
may also be one with Him in His Resurrection.
Remember also our brothers and sisters
who have fallen asleep in the hope of the resurrection,
and all who have died in Your mercy:
welcome them into the light of Your face.

Eucharistic Prayer III: To our departed brothers and sisters
and to all who were pleasing to You at their passing from this life,
give kind admittance to Your kingdom.
There we hope to enjoy for ever the fullness of Your glory.

Eucharistic Prayer IV: Remember also
those who have died in the peace of Your Christ
and all the dead, whose faith You alone have known.
To all of us, Your children, grant, O merciful Father,
that we may enter into a heavenly inheritance
with the Blessed Virgin Mary, Mother of God,
and with Your Apostles and Saints in Your kingdom.
There, with the whole of creation, freed from the corruption of sin and death,
may we glorify You through Christ our Lord.

In each of these Eucharistic prayers we find echoes of the Jewish prayer: peace, rest, light and
turning to the everlasting God of mercy to request this for the deceased.

It is possible by looking carefully at the Greek to see in Matthew 14:13-21 an account of Jesus
sitting Shiva with His apostles after the death of St John the Baptist. In every other account of
the feeding of a multitude Jesus preaches, but not in this account.

<http://www.societyofsaints.net/blog/how-did-they-get-there-on-foot-before-jesus>

Excerpt below:

“After all the parables in Matt 13, Jesus had left the district and paid a visit to Nazareth, and in
the first part of Matt 14 we have an account of the death of St John the Baptist. Therefore the
lakeside towns had not seen Jesus for a little while.

What we do know is that the disciples of St John the Baptist got the news to Jesus, and by
extension to those disciples of Jesus who had previously been disciples of John. Jesus and John
were blood relatives, cousins, and several of the apostles would have looked upon John as a

spiritual father. Due to these close connections, it is likely that this news got to Jesus before it got to the rest of the district, possibly by some of John's disciples travelling in haste.

This put Jesus and those apostles into an official period of mourning, which is a week in length and known as shiva. During this time of shiva mourners are not expected to do much more than exist, but they do expect condolence visits from friends and relatives, and the visitors are expected to bring the food.

The news must have hit the apostolic company hard, and it seems like Jesus wasted no time in getting them off to a lonely spot where they could have some privacy to work through the initial waves of grief. They pack their travelling gear, and they pack provisions and off they go. It seems reasonable that they park Peter's boat and then head deep into the hills to sit shiva together.

Meanwhile, back in the lakeside towns of Galilee, the news of the death of St John the Baptist breaks. In their lifetime, a true prophet has been killed, one whom many of them had met, and all of them had heard of. It is shocking. In their bereft-ness, they want to try and make sense of this with Jesus. He's not at home. Neither are the apostles, nor their travel gear. Peter's boat isn't moored in its usual place, but everyone knows what Peter's boat looks like. It isn't long before sailors and fishermen bring in the news of where Peter's boat is now. The crowds aren't stupid, they can put 2 and 2 together, and deduce that they are sitting shiva privately. But at some point shiva will end, and Jesus and the apostles will return to the boat, however there's no guarantee that they are going to go back home.

But they will return to the boat, and the crowds can make educated guesses about when shiva will end. They could get themselves and their sick ones to that lonely place by then. And they need the reassurance that God is still in control. So travel plans are made, and off on foot they go. Plenty of them may have even camped out waiting for Jesus to reappear. Just like people get to places early to watch New Year's Eve fireworks or Boxing Day sales. Some wish to offer condolence, some want their sick ones healed, some want reassurance.

Chances are that it took a little bit longer than expected for Jesus and the apostles to re-emerge. Likely too that the foot-travelers' provisions were close to empty. We know that the apostles' provisions were empty, because if they filled twelve baskets full of scraps, it stands to reason they were empty to begin with. It is another reason that the shiva concept makes sense. If they had just arrived, those baskets would have been full, not empty but for 5 loaves and 2 fish. The actual word used for these baskets is 'kophinous', the kind of baskets to carry kosher food that travelers used.

In this scenario, the timing makes sense, the size of the crowd makes sense, the coming forth of Jesus from seclusion makes sense, the absence of teaching and preaching makes sense, and the filling of the baskets makes sense.

This was a ministry time of presence to the people, listening to their fears, their grief and anxiety, and healing those sick ones who had made the difficult journey.

But there's no food!

And food is definitely a part of shiva! Visitors are encouraged to bring food that is crowd pleasing and which can easily be served and shared, and to avoid food that requires work on the part of the mourners.

The 7 days of shiva might be closing for Jesus and the apostles, but it is likely that it is still within shiva for the crowd – assuming that Jesus got the news of St John the Baptist's death at least half a day, and maybe up to 2 days before the crowd did.

God provides the food, through the miracle. Bread that is easy to serve and easy to share. What a thought! That through this miracle God the Father is sitting shiva together with His people over the death of St John the Baptist, and thereby consoling them in an extraordinary way. What a memorable wake for the prophet who heralded Jesus!"

Therefore, in the time of Jesus since they followed the Jewish mourning protocols, they would have used some version of the "God, full of mercy" prayer.

Remember that the Sadducees did not believe in the resurrection, but that the Pharisees did, and that the two factions squabbled a lot about it. Then remember how much interaction Jesus had with the Pharisees and how little interaction Jesus had with the Sadducees according to the accounts in the Gospels.

The Pharisees and Sadducees were still squabbling when the time came to determine the Hebrew canon of scripture, as well as both still being in fear of Rome. 1 and 2 Maccabees reignited both fears and squabbles, so it was left out of the canon, even though everyone was living their faith practice as though it was canon.

<https://www.myjewishlearning.com/article/omitting-the-maccabees/>

The names of the Maccabee leaders were Matthias, Judas, Simon, John, Jonathan. Can you count several names of Apostles? Does it give you some idea of how important the Maccabee story was to the people of Israel when Jesus walked the earth? That's why at the time of Jesus they were expecting a Messiah in the style of the Maccabees, mustering armies to wipe out their enemies under an anointed leader and all the rest.

Man-made traditions don't last very long, 10 years, 20 years, 40 years. Only those traditions that have something God-breathed in them last; like praying for the dead in Catholic, Orthodox and Jewish tradition.

Have a browse through this list of 14 ways that are common ways of honouring the deceased in Jewish society: https://www.chabad.org/library/article_cdo/aid/372952/jewish/14-Jewish-Ways-to-Honor-the-Soul-of-a-Deceased-Loved-One.htm

Many of those practices are still common amongst all of us, whatever we believe in, especially visiting the grave sites, and praying there, keeping them clean, lighting candles, donating things in memory of the deceased, special prayers on anniversaries of death, and the 'don't send flowers donate to such and such charity instead'. It is not so much now, but back before 1900 it was extremely common for a new child to be named for a recently deceased relative. It all started in biblical times pre-Jesus and is still going strong.

Other Scripture references

Now let us turn to those Scriptural references which aren't quite as clear as 2 Maccabees 12.

They are all mentioned here:

https://www.vatican.va/archive/ENG0015/_P2N.HTM

1 Cor 3:14-15 "If his structure stands up to it, he will get his wages; if it is burnt down, he will be the loser, and although he is saved himself, it will be as one who has gone through fire."

1 Pet 1:7 "so that, when Jesus Christ is revealed, your faith will have been tested and proved like gold – only it is more precious than gold, which is corruptible even though it bears testing by fire – and then you will have praise and glory and honour."

Matt 12:31 "And so I tell you, every one of men's sins and blasphemies will be forgiven, but blasphemy against the Spirit will not be forgiven."

Job 1:5 "Once each series of banquets was over, Job would send for them to come and be purified, and at dawn on the following day he would offer a holocaust for each one of them. 'Perhaps' Job would say 'my sons have sinned and in their hearts affronted God.' So that was what he used to do after each series."

Thus it is biblical to pray that someone else be loosed from their sins, and that can apply to both the living and the dead since Jesus is Lord of both realms. Rom 14:7-9

Just like a word of knowledge

Many people are used to how a word of knowledge operates. God reveals a situation to a person eg there is man in this place who is deaf in his right ear. God only reveals because He wants some kind of grace released. A man presents himself, saying yes I am deaf in my right ear. People then pray with expectation of healing, and God's grace of healing is released.

Stories about purgatory are very similar. God reveals that a specific deceased person requires certain actions or prayers to complete their time of purification. Then when those requirements are filled God will reveal that it is accomplished. These stories are numerous in both Jewish and Christian traditions.

Here is one from <https://jewinthecity.com/2022/11/why-do-jews-pray-for-the-dead/>

"Rabbi Akiva once saw a man struggling under a heavy burden. Rabbi Akiva was concerned that

this might be an overworked slave but it turned out to be the soul of an unrepentant sinner whose punishment was to gather wood, which was then used to burn him daily. He told Rabbi Akiva that the only way to free him was if his son would stand in front of the congregation and say “Barchu es Hashem hamevorah” or “Yisgadal v’yiskadash...,” causing the congregation to respond, “Baruch Hashem hamevorah l’olam voed” or “Yehei shmei rabbah...,” respectively. (These are the prayers of Barchu and Kaddish, in which the leader of the service calls upon the congregation to praise God, which they then do.)

Rabbi Akiva tracked down the man’s wife and circumcised the deceased’s son. When the child was old enough, he tutored him and taught him how to daven. As soon as the boy recited the appropriate prayers in shul, his father’s soul appeared to Rabbi Akiva in a dream and informed him that he had been relieved of his afterlife torments.”

Here is one from <https://www.newadvent.org/fathers/0324.htm> about the martyr Perpetua who was martyred around 202AD in Carthage and her brother Dinocrates who had died a pagan:

“After a few days, while we were all praying, on a sudden, in the middle of our prayer, there came to me a word, and I named Dinocrates; and I was amazed that that name had never come into my mind until then, and I was grieved as I remembered his misfortune. And I felt myself immediately to be worthy, and to be called on to ask on his behalf. And for him I began earnestly to make supplication, and to cry with groaning to the Lord. Without delay, on that very night, this was shown to me in a vision. I saw Dinocrates going out from a gloomy place, where also there were several others, and he was parched and very thirsty, with a filthy countenance and pallid color, and the wound on his face which he had when he died. This Dinocrates had been my brother after the flesh, seven years of age, who died miserably with disease — his face being so eaten out with cancer, that his death caused repugnance to all men. For him I had made my prayer, and between him and me there was a large interval, so that neither of us could approach to the other. And moreover, in the same place where Dinocrates was, there was a pool full of water, having its brink higher than was the stature of the boy; and Dinocrates raised himself up as if to drink. And I was grieved that, although that pool held water, still, on account of the height to its brink, he could not drink. And I was upset, and knew that my brother was in suffering. But I trusted that my prayer would bring help to his suffering; and I prayed for him every day until we passed over into the prison of the camp, for we were to fight in the camp-show. Then was the birthday of Geta Cæsar, and I made my prayer for my brother day and night, groaning and weeping that he might be granted to me. Then, on the day on which we remained in fetters, this was shown to me. I saw that that place which I had formerly observed to be in gloom was now bright; and Dinocrates, with a clean body well clad, was finding refreshment. And where there had been a wound, I saw a scar; and that pool which I had before seen, I saw now with its margin lowered even to the boy's navel. And one drew water from the pool incessantly, and upon its brink was a goblet filled with water; and Dinocrates drew near and began to drink from it, and the goblet did not fail. And when he was

satisfied, he went away from the water to play joyously, after the manner of children, and I awoke. Then I understood that he was translated from the place of punishment.

In <https://www.churchfathers.org/purgatory> you will find this and other examples of purgatory stories in the time zone between Pentecost and the final acceptance of the canon of Scripture in 419 AD. One of them is within living memory of the apostles. All this in the early Church founded by Jesus upon Peter before the bible came to be in its current form.

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How come Purgatory is not considered biblical in Protestant circles?

One answer is that it did not fit into Martin Luther's doctrine of salvation by faith alone. A doctrine which is not supported by Gal 5:6 *"since in Christ Jesus whether you are circumcised or not makes no difference – what matters is faith that makes its power felt through love"* nor James 2:18 *"You say you have faith and I have good deeds; I will prove to you that I have faith by showing you my good deeds – now you prove to me that you have faith without any good deeds to show."*

The faith necessary for salvation is a free and unearned gift obtained through the sacrifice on the Cross by Jesus. But the expressing of that faith in accepting Jesus as Lord and Saviour is like marriage vows, they make no sense unless you intend to fully live out that life covenant with Him.

The inherent danger in 'once saved always saved' is that it provides no impetus to live a life pleasing to God. Ezekiel 34 should haunt us all, especially Ezekiel 34:12, *"The integrity of an upright man will not save him once he has chosen to sin; the wickedness of a wicked man will no longer condemn him once he renounces wickedness, nor will an upright man live on the strength of his integrity once he has chosen to sin."*

The doctrine of purgatory on the other hand provides a wonderful impetus to avoid sinning, and to take the steps to get right with God on a regular and frequent basis, seeking His mercy for our sins. With the doctrine of purgatory the fullness of the holiness of God is displayed, as well as His divine justice and His divine mercy. For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, haven't we? Hebrews 12:1 reminds us *"to throw off everything that hinders us, especially the sin that clings so easily, and keep running in the race we have already started"*. Since we start that race through the free gift of salvation in Jesus Christ, it means we still have constant

need to remove sin from our lives. At the end of the amazing description of the heavenly temple of God in Revelation 21 we read in verse 27: *“nothing unclean/impure may come into it: no one who does what is loathsome or false, but only those who are listed in the Lamb’s book of life”*. We know from the Old Testament that God requires spotless purity, and the severe penalties given to those who infringed that purity, like Uzzah touching the ark instead of carrying it properly with the shafts.

What happened under Martin Luther resembles the crimes of Jeroboam son of Nebat. Jeroboam who was given by God the leadership of ten tribes of Israel, and instead of serving the Lord God, went about setting up alternate ways of worship to prevent the people returning to worship in the Jerusalem temple, because if they did return to temple worship they would gradually making their way back to the Davidic line of kings and Jeroboam’s kingship would cease.

Look at what Martin Luther did. When books in the universally accepted bible prior to 1520 AD did not agree with his doctrine of faith alone, he removed them. A man without even any episcopal authority decided that he knew better than the bishops of the whole church who went through that lengthy process in 382-419 AD. All those books now called Apocrypha from the Septuagint were deleted by Luther because they contained seeds that would lead back to Catholic and Orthodox faith practice. You noticed that reference in Sirach/Ecclesiasticus 7 about praying for the dead, didn’t you? It is only one example among many of those seeds, and everyone at the time of Jesus spoke that parable knew which book of the Septuagint He was alluding to in that great depiction of the last judgement.

Purgatory is biblical. Even in the truncated bible version by Martin Luther, it is still biblical.