

APOLOGETICS MADE EASY

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Purgatory

Purgatory is a transitional state between our time on earth and in heaven. Many of us will not die in a state of sufficient holiness for us to enter immediately into heaven. Purgatory is a means by which we will be purged (the source of the name “purgatory”) or purified over some period of time after which we will be welcomed into the eternal kingdom of heaven. The concept of purgatory is based on scripture, Jewish customs and on the mercy of God.

In 2 Maccabees 12:39-46, the author recounts how some Jewish soldiers died with indications that they were worshipping false gods. Judas Maccabeus led prayers for them, recognizing that the prayers of him and his men could help free those who had died from the penalty for their sins. So those who die and experience purgatory are purified not only by being kept out of heaven for a time but are also aided by the prayers of the living on their behalf.

In Matthew 5:25-26, Jesus teaches his followers: “You will not be released until you have paid the last penny.” How many of us, at the moment of our death, will “have paid the last penny,” in other words, have made full and complete satisfaction for our sins?

Similarly, in Hebrews 12:22-24, there is a reference to those in heaven, among whom are “the spirits of the just made perfect.” At 1 Corinthians 3:12-15, St. Paul describes “the fire...which will test the quality of each one’s work.” And St. Peter, at 1 Peter 4:6, speaks of the gospel being preached even to the dead. Finally, in Revelation 21:27, we are told that “nothing unclean” will enter into heaven.

Purgatory is a final opportunity for the dead to seek God’s mercy and to benefit from the prayers of the living.