Notes on the Apocrypha

Foundational Development on the Roman Catholic Doctrine of Purgatory

2 Maccabees 12:42-46

“And they turned to supplication, praying that the sin that had been committed might be wholly blotted out…In doing this he acted very well and honorably, taking account of the resurrection. For if he were not expecting that those who had fallen would rise again, it would have been superfluous and foolish to pray for the dead. But if he was looking to the splendid reward that is laid up for those who fall asleep in godliness, it was a holy and pious thought. Therefore, he made atonement for the dead, so that they might be delivered from their sin.”

Catholic Perspective

In this text, we discover Judas Maccabeus and members of his Jewish military forces collecting the bodies of some fallen comrades who had been killed in battle. When they discovered these men were carrying “sacred tokens of the idols of Jamnia, which the law forbids the Jews to wear” (2 Maccabees 12:40), Judas and his men pray for the dead, that they may be forgiven this transgression. Jewish belief in a place of purgation for lesser sins committed in this life but not yet “wholly blotted out” is unmistakable here. Moreover, we see an explicit declaration that the prayers of the living have a role in the purification of the dead.

Protestant Perspective

It is because of doctrinal accounts such as from 2 Maccabees 12:42-46 that are in definite conflict with foundational Christian doctrine (especially the atonement of our Lord Jesus Christ), that none of the intertestamental apocryphal books are considered to be inspired by the Holy Spirit. Therefore, they are not included in Bible translations that come directly from Protestant sources. By implication, the Roman Catholic doctrine of Purgatory is rejected by every Protestant denomination.
Biblically

The atoning sacrifice of our Lord Jesus Christ on the cross at the place of the Skull for all of the sins of humanity is the defining doctrinal distinctive in the entire Bible. This atonement of redemption by blood is foreshadowed throughout the Old Testament in animal sacrifices required in the Law of Moses, and before then in the book of Genesis. Jesus Christ our Lord initiated the New Covenant through His shed blood as the perfect sacrifice for the full atonement of sin through God’s forgiveness for all who believe in the name of the Son of God through faith. All sin is forgiven in this life while man has breath to cry out to the Lord and to be saved. Biblically, there is no possibility of salvation or forgiveness after one has died physically for an unbeliever. Therefore, prayers for the dead are not just fruitless, they are a dangerous deception that the prayers of the living can help someone in “Purgatory” to be atoned for by another sinful human being to a fullness of salvation. Thus, our Lord’s sacrifice would become insufficient to save anyone. Thankfully, this is not the case, as the New Testament book of Hebrews 9:26b-28 says, “…but now once at the consummation of the ages He (Jesus Christ) has been manifested to put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself. And inasmuch as it is appointed for men to die once and after this comes judgment, so Christ also, having been offered once to bear the sins of many, will appear a second time for salvation without reference to sin, to those who eagerly await Him.”

On Probable Apocryphal Quotes from the New Testament Book of Jude

The single chapter New Testament book of Jude has 3 verses (9, 14-15) which quite probably are taken from the apocrypha. Verse 9 is perhaps found in the apocryphal book, “The Assumption of Moses.” Verses 14-15 are quite probably taken from the apocryphal book, “The book of Enoch.” While the Apostle Paul never quoted from the apocrypha, he did quote secular philosophers known in his day. Aratus from Acts 17:28; Menander from 1 Corinthians 15:33 and Epimenides from Titus 1:12. It may be rightly asked about the use of these sources in our divinely inspired Bible. I believe a helpful response may be given from the NASB study notes from Jude 1:9 which says concerning the above: “Such usage in no way suggests that the quotations, or the books from which they were taken, are divinely inspired. It only means that the biblical author found the quotations to be a helpful confirmation, clarification or illustration.”