

The Book of Life

“... And all that dwell upon the earth shall worship him, whose names are not written in the book of life of the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world” (Revelation 13:8)

The New Testament portion of our daily readings, Revelation chapter 13, brings to our attention a particular grouping of people “whose names are *not written in the book of life* of the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world” (Rev. 13:8). It is self-evident that these represent the class of the rejected; those who are not worthy of being preserved through the judgments to the glories of the Kingdom. Not being written in the book of life is a position of condemnation, with their very names being obscured by the passing of time, until they be remembered no more. Contrariwise, those whose names are written in the Lamb’s book of life are those who constitute the great company of the redeemed: individuals from every age who sought not the things of this world, but that which is to come. We need therefore, to individually assess where we stand in relation to the Book of Life and whether our names will be found written there when the judgment shall sit, or not. The answer to this question will secure our eternal destiny: to live and reign with our Lord, or to bear the condemnation suited to those who sowed to the flesh during the days of their mortal existence. It is important therefore, to consider the references in Scripture to this “book”, to help us examine our own standing in relation to it.

Whether there is a literal book with literal pages upon which literal words are written with literal ink, naming the redeemed is an interesting line of enquiry, but one which cannot be ascertained with certainty. The Bible speaks of it in a matter-of-fact way, which might lead one to conclude that there is such a book being kept; but the case cannot be proved. Either way, whether the “book” is symbolic or literal, what concerns us is the more important issue of whether it contains our names or not. We propose therefore, to consider the references of Scripture in their given context, to see what we can learn.

The first direct reference to the Book of Life is found in the words of Moses, expressing his despair at the rebellion of Israel, and his desire that if it were possible, that he would be blotted out of the book instead of them:

“Oh, this people have sinned a great sin, and have made them gods of gold. Yet now, if thou wilt forgive their sin – and if not, blot me, I pray thee, out of thy book which thou hast written” (Exo. 32:32-33).

Here, we find Moses in a position whereby he offered to forfeit his eternal life, as a substitute for the people if Yahweh would not forgive them: “if not, blot me ...”. This is most instructive when we consider the standard church teaching concerning the Atonement: the means by which salvation comes through Christ. The popular figure is we are in debt: we owe an amount which it is just impossible for us to pay. Jesus then pays the debt on our behalf – as our substitute. But amongst the myriad of difficulties with this approach, by definition, there is no forgiveness at work here. The debt still has to be paid. The debt is not forgiven: it is still exacted and is still paid, albeit by another man. Another related idea is that a man is due to be hanged for a particular crime. He cannot save himself – but Jesus volunteers to be hanged in his place, as his substitute. Hence the guilty party is set free, and Jesus bears the punishment instead. But again, there is no forgiveness in this scenario: the sentence still has to be carried out: it is not forgiven. A substitute is not accepted by the Great Creator, and the case of Moses emphasizes this point. He offered to be punished as a substitute for the people – but only if Yahweh would not forgive their sin: “if not ...”. This proves that the substitutional arrangement only operates in the absence of forgiveness. And the verse that follows show that such an arrangement was rejected by Yahweh:

"Yahweh said unto Moses, **Whosoever hath sinned against me**, him will I blot out of my book. Therefore now go ... nevertheless in the day when I visit, I will visit their sin upon them. And Yahweh plagued the people, because they made the calf which Aaron made" (Exo. 32:35).

There are a number of other highly interesting points in relation to this discourse. The common perception is that men of faith have their names written in the Book, whereas men of disobedience and unbelief do not have the names written there. The Scriptural position, however, is different. Moses's words prove that the names of the people were already written in the book - that is not the question he raises. Their names had already been written, the issue being whether or not they were to be blotted out. The names, we learn from Revelation 17:8, are written "from the foundation of the world". What wonderful encouragement that provides: instead of being afraid that we might not be good enough in some way, or that we need to achieve great things in order to be written in the Lamb's book of life we can be assured that our Names are already written there – and have been so for ages past, from the foundation of the world. And there is virtually nothing that can separate us from that position:

"I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, Nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Rom. 8:38-39).

We said that "virtually nothing" can separate us from Christ – there is one exception: our own selves. Jude describes unrepentant sinners as "they who separate themselves" (Jude 1:19). As in the case of Israel, cited above: "Whosoever hath sinned against me, him will I blot out of my book". Sin unrepented of is certain to cause blotting out of the book – we can, by our own actions cause our names to be blotted out, so that they do not appear there at the end when the judgment shall take place. But as we said, there is nevertheless a great encouragement: instead of proving ourselves worthy to be written there, our emphasis is of following our Master to ensure that our names stay there.

Of the wicked, it is said:

"Yahweh will not spare him, but then the anger of Yahweh and his jealousy shall smoke against that man, and all the curses that are written in this book shall lie upon him and Yahweh shall blot out his name from under heaven: (Deut. 29:20).

Notice that again, the emphasis is on personal responsibility: he who wilfully disobeys Yahweh, his name shall be blotted out. He will not be spared, but his very name shall be expunged from the book.

It is significant to compare the example of Moses with the attitude of mind of the Apostle Paul. Moses offered himself as a substitute, and Paul was willing to do the same:

"For I could wish that myself were accursed from Christ for my brethren, my kinsman according to the flesh ..." (Rom. 9:3)

Paul also was willing to be written out of the Lamb's book, and be accursed from Christ, if it were possible for him to bear away the punishment of the people. But it was not accepted, upon the basis that men and women bear a personal responsibility for their own actions and decision, and their

judgment shall be based on personal faith and conduct, not by causing another person to suffer as a substitute. Interestingly, this point is inferred in Romans 9, cited above. Verse 15 reads:

“For he saith to Moses I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion (Rom. 9:15).

The point being that there are those who will be recipients of Divine Mercy, and others who will not; based upon how we have made use of the privileges and opportunities given to us through our association with the blood of Christ.

In Philippians chapter 4, the Apostle speaks of his fellow-workers in the Truth as “my fellowlabourers whose names are in the book of life” (Phil. 4:3). It is evident then, that those who labour in the Word and Doctrine (1 Tim. 5:17) and engage themselves in the apostolic work of promoting the Truth that saves, will be honoured in the day when the books are opened for judgment. And again, the Master spoke of those who make up the great company of the Redeemed:

“He that overcometh, the same shall be clothed in white raiment; and I will not blot out his name out of the book of life, but I will confess his name before my Father, and before the angels” (Rev. 3:5).

We who desire to have our names in that book must therefore seek to overcome in our warfare of faith, that they will be confessed before Messiah’s Father.

But whilst there is a book (either literal or otherwise) containing the names of those who are in the way of salvation, there is also a book that contains the works and experiences of the redeemed. The Psalmist spoke of this:

“Thou tellest my wanderings: Put thou my tears into thy bottle: **are they not in thy book?**”
(Psa. 56:8)

So, the persecutions and distresses that come upon the saints are not disregarded or forgotten, they are written in Yahweh’s Book. So are their deeds, as John saw the resurrected believers:

“And I saw the dead, small and great, stand before God; and the books were opened: and another book was opened, which is the book of life: and the dead were **judged out of those things which were written in the books, according to their works** ... And whosoever was not found written in the book of life was cast into the lake of fire” (Rev. 20:12-13, 15).

There evidently, therefore, a record being kept of the deeds of those whose names are in the Book of Life, and they will be judged according to what is contained in it. But those sins that have been repented of will be expunged, and no longer held against us. So King David, who was an adulterer and murderer was able to pray:

“Have mercy upon me, O God, according to thy loving kindness: According unto the multitude of thy tender mercies **blot out my transgressions**. Wash me throughly from mine iniquity, And cleanse me from my sin” (Psa. 51:1-2).

Again, the prophet describes the graciousness of the Lord in forgiving the sins of his servants:

“I, even I am he that **blotteth out thy transgressions** for mine own sake, and will not remember thy sins.” (Isa. 43:25, see also 44:22)

When the responsible are judged out of the things contained in the book therefore, their sins that have been repented of will have been blotted out, not being remembered against them any longer. But by contrast, Nehemiah prayed of the unrepentant, who hindered his work in building up the House of God:

“... cover not their iniquity, and **let not their sin be blotted out** from before thee: for they have provoked thee to anger before the builders” (Neh. 4:5).

The things concerning the Lord Jesus Christ were also written in a book. He was the Word “made flesh” (Jno. 1:14), even the embodiment of all the principles written in the Scriptures. So, he was able to say:

“Then said I, Lo, I come: **In the volume of the book it is written of me**, I delight to do thy will, O God, Yea, thy Law is hidden within my heart” (Psa. 40:7-8).

And again:

“... thine eyes did see my substance, yet being unperfect: and **in thy book all my members were written**, Which in continuance were fashioned, When as ye there was none of them” (Psa. 139:16)

Returning to our reading in Revelation chapter 13, we find that those who pay homage to the false religious system being described there, are those whose names are “not written in the book of life”.

In the days in which we live, it is very common for folk to say that they all have freedom to worship God in any way they choose. All men have equally valid viewpoints and are all entitled to their individual opinion.

The Bible does use the language of having a viewpoint – but not in the way that men do. In Bible terms, men can either see, or are blind, being led by those who are blind:

“... they be blind leaders of the blind. And if the blind lead the blind, both shall fall into the ditch” (Mat. 15:4).

Blind people have no “point of view” – they can see nothing! In Bible terms, men are only entitled to worship their Maker in the way He has shown: “in spirit and in truth” (Jno. 4:24). God’s word is Truth (see Jno. 17:16). That therefore which differs from it, is not truth – by definition, it is a lie!

But however politically incorrect it might seem to men, Bible teaching is clear. The false religious system described in the Book of Revelation has as its adherents those “whose names are not written in the book of life”.

We need therefore to consider very carefully how we offer our worship before our Creator. Cain thought he could worship in his own way – as have many other since then. But he was rejected, and so will they be. We desire to have our names in the book of life, and so must approach God on His terms, and not ours – only then can we be accepted and granted an entrance into His future Kingdom.

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