

# THE BOOK OF LIFE

*"He that overcometh, the same shall be clothed in white raiment; and I will not blot his name out of the book of life" (Rev. 3:5).*

Does this verse teach that believers who do not live a victorious "overcoming" life will have their names blotted out of the book of life, and thus be lost? Quite the contrary, it teaches that the true believer shall not have his name blotted out of this book. He is secure! Specifically, the "overcomer" in this verse is one, during the Tribulation period, who has surmounted tremendous Satan inspired opposition and persecution to become a true believer.

But are there not other verses relating to the blotting of names out of a book? Yes there are, but many of them do not have the same book in view!

## THE KEY VERSE

The solution to the matter is found in Psalm 69:28. This passage refers prophetically to the future leaders of Israel, who are identified in Romans 11:9, 10 (quoting from Psa. 69:22, 23) as those rejecting the Savior, even after His resurrection. Of these Israelites, hardened in unbelief, Christ, speaking through David, cries out, *"Add iniquity unto their iniquity; and let them not come into Thy righteousness. Let them be blotted out of the book of the living, and not be written with the righteous"* (Psa. 69:27, 28). Two books, not just one, are in view in this verse: A book from which the names of the wicked may be blotted out and another where their names will not even be entered.

The first, called the "book of the living" includes the names of those who were never saved -- the very murderers of God's Son. The "life" mentioned in the title of this book couldn't be eternal life, for the names of wicked men are found there. It must refer to physical life, a record of all those, both the wicked and the righteous, who will live physically on the earth. This is the book referred to in Psalm 139:16. This verse reads, *"Thine eyes have seen my unformed substance; and in Thy book they were all written, the days that were ordained for me, when as yet there was not one of them"* (NASB).

Whether the names were entered at conception, upon their births, or back in eternity as God foresaw they would some day be born, is not revealed -- and is not of any importance to our topic. Names can be blotted out of this book. Whenever any man dies his name is blotted out of it, whether he be saved or lost. Christ is here praying (through David) that a physical judgment be brought against these men, resulting in their deaths. His prayer was answered in 70 ad. when the Romans came against Jerusalem, burned it to the ground, and slew all the leaders of Israel and their equally guilty followers. (The believers could have, should have, and -- reportedly -- did escape from Jerusalem before it fell, by following the instructions given by Christ in Luke 21:20 - 22).

But there is another book referred to in Psalm 69:28. It is a book containing only the names of the righteous. It is evident, from the references to it, that names are written into it only

when they become justified by faith and are thus, in their standing, totally "righteous." Christ prays that the evil men described in Psalm 69:18 - 27 will not have their names entered into this book.

### **THE BOOK OF THE (PHYSICALLY) LIVING.**

When the Israelites made a golden calf to worship, while Moses was on the mount to receive the Law, God was very angry. He told Moses, "*Let me alone, that I may destroy them, and blot out their name from under heaven: and I will make of thee a nation mightier and greater than them*" (Deut. 9:14). Moses interceded for Israel and delivered them from physical extinction. A bit later he was concerned that God might even yet slay them. He prayed, "*Yet now, if Thou wilt forgive their sin --; and if not, blot me, I pray Thee, out of Thy book which Thou hast written.*" He was saying, in effect, "If You slay Israel, slay me also." God replied, "*Whosoever hath sinned against me, him will I blot out of my book*" (Ex. 32:32, 33). It is clear that this book has to do with physical life, since physical death was the threat. Ex. 32:33 links the book mentioned here back to the doom hanging over Israel, so the execution of the threat would have been a blotting of their names out of the book. The matter of eternal life is not in view in these verses.

In Deut. 29:20 Moses announces a judgment upon the ungodly and rebellious in Israel. "*The Lord will not spare him, but then the anger of the Lord and His jealousy shall smoke against that man, and all the curses in this book [the book of Deuteronomy] shall lie upon him, and the Lord shall blot out his name from under heaven.*" Here it is an unbeliever whose name was never "written with the righteous" whose name is blotted out from under heaven. It quite evidently refers to the book (even though the word "book" is not used) of the physically alive, and to physical death as a judgment.

Isaiah speaks about the time when the judgments of the Great Tribulation will be past and "*the Branch of the Lord [Christ] will be beautiful and glorious, and the fruit of the earth shall be excellent and comely for those of Israel who have escaped.*" (Isa. 4:2 -- See Ezek. 20:33 - 44 for details about this judgment and the fate of those who are "purged" and those who are spared). In that day Israelites who have escaped the judgments, and are still physically alive, will see Christ, recognize Him by the nail prints in His hands (Zech. 12:10), and will be saved (Rom. 11:26). Of that day he writes, "*And it shall come to pass that he that is left in Zion, and he that remaineth in Jerusalem [after the judgments are over], shall be called holy [be justified], even every one that is written among the living in Jerusalem*" (Isa. 4:3). In other words, those of Israel whose names are still in the book of the living at that time will all be saved, and thus have their names entered into the Book of (spiritual) Life.

A large part of Psalm 109 refers to Judas Iscariot (Psa. 109:6 - 20 -- compare verse eight with Acts 1:20). Christ is speaking through the Psalmist. He says, "*Let his [Judas'] posterity be cut off; and in the generation following let their names be blotted out*" (Psa. 109:13). The descendants of Judas were not believers, their names were not written in the book of spiritual life. It is the book of the physically alive from which their names were to be blotted in judgment -- by physical death.

Revelation 22:19 appears to be warning that those who "*take away from this book* [the

book of Revelation]" will be slain and not live to enjoy the blessings foretold for those living through the Millennium and in the New Jerusalem. Instead, they will be "purged out" from the nation as "rebels" (Ezek. 20:38 and context). Even if the "Book of Life" mentioned in Rev. 20:19 is the book of spiritual life, there is no evidence their names have already been entered into it. Rather, these rebels would be denied the life and blessings that could have been theirs if their names had been entered into it in that day when all Israel was saved (Rom. 11:26). There is a strong possibility also that the words "Book of Life" in this verse should read "Tree of Life" as in the NASB, NIV, and other translations -- and in the Greek text in my possession. In either case it is not taking away something they already possess, but denying them something they could have obtained.

### THE BOOK OF (SPIRITUAL) LIFE

Daniel 12:1 may be a companion verse to Isaiah 4:3. It may be declaring that every Jew still alive at the close of the Tribulation will be delivered from his sins. However, it seems more in keeping with the text and context to recognize here God's faithfulness in sparing the lives of the believing remnant during the Tribulation (as typified by the Hebrew children preserved through the fire in Daniel chapter three). The verse reads, in part, "*and there shall be a time of trouble, such as never was since there was a nation even to that same time: and at that time thy people shall be delivered, every one that shall be found written in the book.*" Jeremiah 30:7 bears testimony to this same time, "*Alas! For that day is great, So that none is like it; and it is the time of Jacob's trouble, but he shall be saved out of it.*"

The book of (spiritual) life is not just "kingdom truth," for Paul, in one of the Prison Epistles, speaks of it. The man who appears to have been the pastor of the church in Philippi is urged to help two women who are causing trouble in the church, and to remember that "*their names are in the book of life*" (Phil. 4:3). He is surely not merely indicating they are still physically alive. He is reminding the pastor that, in spite of the trouble they are causing in the church, they are saved. Compare Luke 10:20.

The rest of the references to the book of spiritual life are found in the book of Revelation. They are Rev. 3:5; 13:8; 17:8; 20:12, 15 and 21:27. (See the previous discussion concerning the "Book of life" [KJV] in Rev. 22:19.)

Those whose names are not written in the book called "the Lamb's Book of Life" (Rev. 21:27) shall wonder, evidently in admiration, after the Beast (17:8) and will worship him (13:8). They shall not enter into the New Jerusalem (21:27) <sup>1</sup> but will be cast into the Lake of Fire (20:15).

In Rev. 3:5 Christ is not saying, "Some believers' names will be blotted out of the Book of Life, but yours will not -- because you are spiritual." He is saying, in effect, "Your names may well be blotted out of the book of the living. You may die, and walk with me in white raiment -- but your names will not be blotted out of the other book, the book of the spiritually

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<sup>1</sup> Rev. 21:27 does not teach that everyone whose name is in the Book of Life will be in the New Jerusalem, but only that everyone in the New Jerusalem will have his name in that book.

alive. You are true believers in a day when so much is evil and counterfeit -- you are 'overcomers.'"

The Book of (spiritual) Life is consulted at the Great White Throne Judgment where only unbelievers are to be tried. Evidently its purpose is to prove to them that they are not real believers, for their names are not listed there and, as a result, they are cast into the Lake of Fire. See Rev. 20:12, 15.

### OTHER BOOKS

Just as Psalm 69:28 differentiates between the book of physical life and the book of eternal life, Revelation 20:12 reveals a difference between the book (singular) of spiritual life and the "books" (plural) containing the records of individual men's deeds. It is the information in the Lamb's Book of Life that determines where men spend eternity. The fact that their names are not written in the book of the redeemed is proof that they are lost, and they are cast into the Lake of Fire (Rev. 20:15). But the severity of their sentence will be according to their works, as revealed in the "books."

What is written in the "books" referred to in Revelation 20:12 is evidently a record of each man's works. There is nothing there to commend him. They are dead works (Heb. 9:14), works of the flesh (Gal. 5:19) and the unfruitful works of darkness (Eph. 5:11). Even his "wonderful works" are seen by God as "iniquity" (Matt. 7:22, 23). His "righteousnesses" are but "filthy rags" before God (Isa. 64:6). Yet this record, written in the "books," could have been blotted out if they had believed God and been justified by faith!

It is true, Christ prays in Psalm 109:14 that the sin of the mother of Judas not be blotted out. Also, Jeremiah asks that the sin of those who have persecuted him not be blotted out of God's sight (Jer. 18:23). Nehemiah likewise prays concerning the enemies of Israel, "Cover not their iniquity, and let not their sin be blotted out from before Thee --" (Neh. 4:5).

However, in gracious and wonderful contrast, God cries out to Israel, "*I, even I, am He that blotteth out thy transgressions for mine own sake, and will not remember thy sins. ... I have blotted out as a thick cloud thy transgressions, and as a cloud, thy sins: return unto me; for I have redeemed thee.*" (Isa. 43:25; 44:22). David, after his tragic sin with Bathsheba and murder of her husband, prayed, "*Have mercy upon me, O God, according to Thy loving-kindness: according unto the multitude of Thy tender mercies blot out my transgressions. ... Hide Thy face from my sins, and blot out all mine iniquities*" (Psa. 51:1, 9).

Peter tells us what happened to those sins that were once written deeply on our record. Christ has borne them in His own body on the tree (1 Pet. 2:24). Paul goes even deeper, to the very nature producing them. He reveals that Christ was made to be sin for us. The result also is more glorious. Not only are the sins taken away and the record of them blotted out, we have a positive righteousness. We are made to be the righteousness of God in Christ (2 Cor. 5:21).<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> This imputed righteousness is the only righteousness acceptable to God for men of any dispensation. When Christ spoke of righteousness in the "Sermon on the Mount," He warned those listening, "*Unless your righteousness surpasses that of the scribes and Pharisees, you shall not enter the kingdom of heaven*" (Matt. 5:20 - NASB). That it was not merely more of the

The unbeliever, if he does not come to Christ before he dies, faces a terrible future. His name will be blotted out of the Book of (physical) Life -- for every unbeliever, without exception, will die physically. His name is not in the Lamb's Book of Life, so he is lost! He will face every sinful thought and deed of his entire life at the Great White Throne. His sins will all be revealed there in the "books" to condemn him.

How glorious is the lot of the true believer! He may have his name blotted out of the book of the living -- but perhaps not. He may not die physically -- ever (John 11:26 for the believing Jews alive at the coming in glory and 1 Thess. 4:17 and 1 Cor. 15:51 for the Body saints at the Rapture). His name is in the book of (spiritual) life and will not be blotted out! He will never stand before the Great White Throne to be judged, for his sins have already been judged at Calvary (John 5:24 for the kingdom saints and Rom. 8:1 for the Body saints).

The kingdom believer will be raised from the dead when Christ comes in glory, a thousand years before the Great White Throne Judgment (Rev. 20:4 - 6). Then Christ will "*give reward unto His servants, the prophets, and to the saints, and them that fear [His] name, small and great* -" (Rev. 11:18). The believers of this age of grace will appear, even earlier, at a "judgment" which is not for punishment of evil works, but for rewards of those whose works were done "by faith." (Rom. 14:23; Heb. 11:6) These "by faith" works are a result of God working in him (Gal. 2:20; Eph. 2:10; Phil. 2:13 -- compare Heb. 13:21) -- the only works still appearing on their records.

Even if our names are blotted out of the Book of (physical) Life we have a wonderful comfort (1 Thess. 4:13 - 18). The "books" hold no terrors for us for He has wiped the pages clean. Best of all, our names will never be blotted out of the Lamb's Book of Life -- we have His promise!

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same righteousness exhibited by the Pharisees, but a different kind of righteousness, is evident. He continues, "*But seek ye first His kingdom and HIS righteousness* --" (Matt. 6:33 - NASB). This interpretation is fortified by Rom. 10:3, 4 - NASB, "*For not knowing about God's righteousness, and seeking to establish their own, they did not subject themselves to the righteousness of GOD. For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes.*" While this truth is amplified and clarified by Paul, it is the basis for justification of believers even in those ages before Paul came on the scene. See Gen. 15:6; Rom. 3:20.