

THE SECOND CENSUS

(Chapter twenty-six)

The Census Itself (Numbers chapter 26)

As we approach a consideration of the second census there are a few observations that may be in order. First of all, neither census was merely a statistical compilation of numbers. The numbers represented specific individuals who were known and registered by name in the genealogical records kept so scrupulously by the Jews. It mentions their “genealogical registration” twelve times, and refers to their “names” fifteen times, in Numbers chapter one (in the NASB). The second census was a counterpart of the first and, referring back to it, Moses said, “To these the land shall be divided as an inheritance, according to the number of *names*” (Num. 26:53). The men were not merely counted – their names were recorded.

Again, these lists did not include all of the Israelites. They did not even include the names of all the *men* of Israel. They were registrations for Israel’s army. It is significant that the Levites were not included in either list. In both passages their census was separate from that of the other tribes (Num. 1:47 – 49; 26:62). When God brought judgment against Israel at Kadesh-barnea it was specifically against “all of you who were numbered, according to your entire number, from twenty years old and above” (Num. 14:29). The Levites were never numbered from twenty years old and upward. One listing is from a month old and upward (Num. 3:39), and the other from thirty years to fifty (4:47). It is clear that the Levites, not listed with the army, were not automatically included in the ban against entering the land.

When God listed the only two exceptions to the ban as Caleb and Joshua, both Moses and Aaron were still living and had been well over twenty when the census was taken. Yet at Kadesh-barnea they were not listed as exceptions to the judgment imposed. They did fail to enter the land, but it was not because of Kadesh-barnea they were kept out of it. Also Aaron’s son, Eleazar, must have been over twenty when the first census was taken,¹ yet he did enter the land.

This distinction between the Levites and those in Israel’s army is seen in the outcome of Korah’s rebellion. Dathan and Abiram, who were Reubenites (Num. 26:7 – 9), joined with Korah, who was a Levite, in his rebellion. The sons of Dathan and Abiram died with them but, even though it seems that Korah was the leader of the insurrection, his sons did not die (Num. 26:11). It made a difference with God that Korah was a Levite and Dathan and Abiram were not.

All of this has significance for us. When a group has a special relationship with the Lord He takes care of them in a special way. Israel was not counted with the nations,

¹ “And these are the names of the sons of Aaron: Nadab, the firstborn, and Abihu, Eleazar, and Ithamar ... the anointed priests, whom he consecrated to minister as priests” (Num. 3: 2, 3). They could not act as priests until they were 30 (Num. 4:47).

Levi was set apart from the rest of the tribes, and the priests set apart from the rest of the Levites. We also have a special relationship to the Lord. We are His own possession, set apart from all others as His very Body. This glorious relationship does not invite us to lead ungodly lives (Eph. 4:1 – 3), nor does it exempt us from chastening (1 Cor. 11:31, 32). It does, however, put us in the home environment with God rather in His courtroom. The way God dealt with Moses and Aaron illustrates this principle for, though they were not under the ban placed on the other tribes, they were chastened as individuals.

As we think of these two books of names in Numbers, several things are suggestive of the two “book(s) of life” mentioned in Scripture. We, today, are concerned with these latter books, so a study of them seems apropos at this point.²

The Books of Life (a comparison)

“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, as some claim, 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*! 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, not a believer who lives an ‘overcoming’ life.

But are there not other verses relating to the blotting of names out of a book? Yes there are, but most of them do not have the book referred to in Revelation 3:5 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 these verses: A book from which the names of the wicked may be blotted out and another where their names will not even be entered in the first place.

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 could not 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. “Thine eyes have seen my unformed substance; and *in Thy book* they were all written, *the days that were*

² Adapted from the book “Help in Hard Places” by W. P. H.

ordained for me, when as yet there was not one of them” (NASB).

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. In Psa. 69:27, 28 Christ is praying (through David) that a physical judgment be brought against His murderers,³ resulting in their early and judgmental 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 men’s names are entered only when they become justified by faith and are thus, in their standing before God, totally “righteous.” Christ prays that the evil men described in Psalm 69:18 - 27 will not have their names entered into *this* book. Having rejected the testimony of the Holy Spirit through the apostles after His resurrection, they have committed the unpardonable sin He had warned them against in Matt. 12:31, 32.

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 announced 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.

³ Their sin in crucifying Him is not in view here. There He prayed “Father, forgive them, they know not what they do.” It is their sin at Acts seven, when they rejected Him after His resurrection, when they knew who He was - and rejected Him again, that this prayer in Psalm 69 applies.

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 of 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 Isaiah 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 has Judas Iscariot in view (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. 22:19 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 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 time. And at that time your people shall be delivered, every one who is 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” 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)⁴ 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, but not as a judgment, for you will walk with me in white raiment -- but your names will *not* be blotted out of the *other* book, the book of the spiritually 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 there is to prove to *them* that they are *not* real believers, for their names are not listed 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.”

Evidently what is written in the “books” referred to in Revelation 20:12 is 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

⁴ 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.

justified by faith!

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 who blots out your transgressions for My own sake; and I will not remember your sins.... I have blotted out, like a thick cloud, your transgressions, and like a cloud, your sins. Return to Me, for I have redeemed you" (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 Your lovingkindness; according to the multitude of Your tender mercies, blot out my transgressions. ... Hide Your face from my sins, and blot out all my 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).⁵

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. 1 Corinthians 15:51 is not for him! 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

⁵ 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 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; 4:3.

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 KJV). 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 them (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!

Parallels

To relate these books to those we have in view in Numbers – the two lists of men prepared for war - notice some comparisons.

The first census, like the book of physical life, was a book of *opportunity*. Those in that census could have entered into the land of promise, but most of them “entered not in because of unbelief” (Heb. 4:6 – KJV). Their prospect had been as bright as the promises of God – but only two actually entered the land. So those whose names are in the book of physical life have the *opportunity* to live forever. After all, God did love the world and desired that all men should be saved (John 3:16; 1 Tim. 2:4).

The second census was a book of *realization* and *certainty*. Every man listed in it did enter the land. They were secure – they were not blotted out of this book! This is dramatically illustrated by what happened after the census was taken. Before they entered the land they were engaged in a bloody conflict with the Midianites. It was so extensive that they took 16,000 prisoners! What about the names in the census just taken? One would naturally expect many of the Israelite army to be killed in the battle. This would mean that some of those in the second census would be blotted out of the book before they had a chance to enter the land. Amazingly, this did not happen! At the close of the war the officers reported to Moses, “Your servants have taken a count of the men of war who are under our command, and *not a man of us is missing*” (Num. 31:49).

So, when time has run its course and eternity dawns, in spite of the furious spiritual battle believers have been engaged in, the Book of *spiritual* Life will stand complete – not one name will be missing! “Now thanks be to God who always leads us in triumph in Christ” (2 Cor. 2:14). “For 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 created thing, shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord” (Rom. 8:38, 39).

Hallelujah! What security! What a Savior!