

The Book of Life

Introduction

The Bible reveals that God keeps a record of the activities of every human being. The most important record is called the Book of Life. Moses, David, Daniel, Paul, and John all bore witness of the Book of Life. The most important factor in this life is to determine and know one's name is in the Book of Life. The following study examines the scriptures which concern this book.

The Texts

Moses: Exodus 32.32-33

Several biblical texts speak of the Book of Life. The first mention of it is in Exodus 32. This passage is the account of how Israel made and worshiped the golden calf while Moses was on Mount Sinai receiving the Decalogue. It seems almost beyond belief that Israel could have fallen so far so fast. God had demonstrated His superiority and power over all the gods of the Egyptians and freed them from the power of Pharaoh, who headed the most powerful nation in the world. Instead of following the God who had freed them from slavery, they chose to return to slavery by worshiping a false god.

God told Moses that because of this sin He would destroy them and start a new people with Moses as the head (Exodus 32.9-10). But Moses argued with God and asked Him to change His mind. Moses recorded:

¹¹ Then Moses entreated the Lord his God, and said, "O Lord, why does Your anger burn against Your people whom You have brought out from the land of Egypt with great power and with a mighty hand? ¹² Why should the Egyptians speak, saying, 'With evil intent He brought them out to kill them in the

mountains and to destroy them from the face of the earth'? Turn from Your burning anger and change Your mind about doing harm to Your people. ¹³ Remember Abraham, Isaac, and Israel, Your servants to whom You swore by Yourself, and said to them, 'I will multiply your descendants as the stars of the heavens, and all this land of which I have spoken I will give to your descendants, and they shall inherit it forever.'"¹⁴ So the Lord changed His mind about the harm which He said He would do to His people (Exodus 32.11-14).

Notice that Moses called Israel "your" people when he appealed to God and reminded Him of His promises. Moses knew his Bible! His case was that God's honor was greater than the nation's sin (Exodus 32.11-14). This much have delighted God for his argument revealed how much Moses had matured in his understanding and appreciation of God. When Moses came down from the mountain to see for himself what his people had done he was furious but asked God to forgive their sin. He offered himself as a substitute for God's wrath. Moses recorded:

³²But now, if You will, forgive their sin—and if not, please blot me out from Your book which You have written!" ³³The Lord said to Moses, "Whoever has sinned against Me, I will blot him out of My book (Exodus 32.32-33).

Moses asked God to blot him from His Book of Life if the Lord would not forgive Israel's sin. In effect, what Moses' offered was that he would be sent to an eternal doom if God would forgive the people. God refused Moses' sacrificial offer and responded that He would blot out from the Book of Life those who had sinned against Him.

Moses: Deuteronomy 29.20

In Deuteronomy, Moses warned his people about the fate of those who turned away from God to follow other gods and idols.

Moses declared:

The Lord shall never be willing to forgive him, but rather the anger of the Lord and His jealousy will burn against that man, and every curse which is written in this book will rest on him, and the Lord will blot out his name from under heaven (Deuteronomy 29.20).

David: Psalm 69.28

Psalm 69 is an imprecatory psalm. David revealed his innermost thoughts about his sufferings from his enemies as a result of his faithfulness to God. He prayed that God would judge them. Part of the Psalm is clearly prophetic about the Messiah. David wrote in verse 26:

For they have persecuted him whom You Yourself have smitten, and they tell of the pain of those whom You have wounded.

As a result of such persecution the decree is:

May they be blotted out of the book of life and may they not be recorded with the righteous (Psalm 69.28).

The “Book of Life” in this passage is ספר החיים and is formed by ספר, “book,” “document,” “decree,” etc. and חיים, the normal word for “life,” “living.” Since the word is plural, it literally means “living,” or “lives.” So it is the “Book of the Living” or the “Book of Lives.”

Daniel: Daniel 12.1

Daniel is the great prophetic book of the Old Testament. God gave Daniel tremendous revelation as to what will happen to the nation of Israel as well as the rest of the world during that period of time known as the Tribulation. Daniel wrote:

Now at that time Michael, the great prince who stands guard

over the sons of your people, will arise. And there will be a time of distress such as never occurred since there was a nation until that time; and at that time your people, everyone who is found written in the book, will be rescued (Daniel 12.1).

The “book” is obviously the “Book of Life.” We know from Revelation that millions will die during this period. The “rescue” is equal to the “overcoming” the Lord spoke of in his message to the seven assemblies. The rescue equals eternal life.

Paul: Philippians 4.3

Many women helped the great apostle Paul in his ministry. Contrary to what some maintain, Paul deeply appreciated women and acknowledged their contributions to furthering the gospel. In recognition of their faithfulness, Paul asked an unknown helper to assist these women. He recognized all of his co-laborers as being in God’s Book of Life. Paul wrote:

Indeed, true companion, I ask you also to help these women who have shared my struggle in the cause of the gospel, together with Clement also and the rest of my fellow workers, whose names are in the book of life (βίβλῳ ζωῆς, Philippians 4.3).

John

The book of Revelation contains the most references to the subject of the Book of Life. This is logical since the Book of Life falls under the category of last things.

“Overcoming” is the great charge the risen Lord gave to the Jewish congregations in Asia Minor (Revelation 2.7, 11, 17, 26, 3.5, 12, 21). The “overcoming” of which the Lord spoke was refusing to worship the False Christ (a.k.a. the Antichrist,

the Beast) by trusting in the true Christ.¹ Jesus had taught the Twelve that during this period of tribulation the one who endured until the end would be saved (Matthew 24.13). The “end” is either physical death (martyrdom) or the return of Christ. During the Tribulation, the gospel of the kingdom will once again be proclaimed (Matthew 24.14). Salvation during this period will not be based upon Paul’s gospel of grace (Acts 20.24; 1 Corinthians 15.1-4) which is that Christ died for his sins and rose from the dead but upon believing in the name of Christ, i.e., believing that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God (Matthew 16.13-20; John 11.23-27; Acts 2.21, 28, 3.16, 4.7, 10, 12, 17-18, 4.30, 5.28, 40-41). This was the gospel of the kingdom (not Paul’s gospel of the grace of God) that Jesus declared would be proclaimed throughout all the nations and then the end would come (Matthew 24.14).

Revelation 3.5

As noted above, Jesus’ message to each of the Jewish assemblies in Revelation 2-3 was one which instructed them about “overcoming.” Each warning was coupled with a promise of eternal life as the result. To the assembly at Sardis, Jesus described salvation with reference to the Book of Life. He said:

He who overcomes will thus be clothed in white garments; and I will not erase his name from the book of life, and I will confess his name before My Father and before His angels (Revelation 3.5).

Revelation 13.8

John wrote of how the vast majority of the world will worship Satan and the Beast, the False Christ. They will not be “overcomers.” Because of this, their names will not be found in the Book of Life. This passage specifically identified the Book of Life as the Lamb’s Book of Life, i.e., the Lord Jesus

Christ. Such designation is appropriate for Jesus revealed that He is the One who will judge men (John 5.22-23). John wrote:

All who dwell on the earth will worship him, everyone whose name has not been written from the foundation of the world in the book of life of the Lamb who has been slain (Revelation 13.8).

Revelation 17.8

This passage is confusing to many but is really quite straightforward. The Beast is the False Christ. He “was,” i.e., he was in alive and in control, then “is not,” i.e., he is killed, then “will come,” i.e., returns to life and “is” again (Revelation 17.11 cf. Revelation 13.3, 12). He is the “eighth” king who was of the original “seven.” Satan is the great deceiver and counterfeiter. It is in the nature of Satan to replicate what the Lord has done. As Jesus arose from the dead, the Beast will similarly, in some fashion which we cannot now know, rise from the dead. He will successfully deceive those whose names are not in the book of life. They will be deceived by his seeming resurrection power.

“The beast that you saw was, and is not, and is about to come up out of the abyss and go to destruction. And those who dwell on the earth, whose name has not been written in the book of life from the foundation of the world, will wonder when they see the beast, that he was and is not and will come (Revelation 17.8).

Revelation 20.12

In this passage, John described what is popularly known as the Great White Throne judgment. The Lord Jesus Christ will act in His role as the judge of unsaved humanity. Two sets of books are present at the judgment: the Book of Life and the Book(s)

of Works. John recorded:

And I saw the dead, the great and the small, standing before the throne, and books were opened; and another book was opened, which is the book of life; and the dead were judged from the things which were written in the books, according to their deeds (Revelation 20.12).

And if anyone's name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire (Revelation 20.15).

The Book of Works contains all of an individual's deeds: good and evil. Both evil and good deeds will demonstrate that the person on trial does not have sufficient righteousness before a holy God. Good deeds will serve the purpose lessening one's punishment in the lake of fire but that punishment is eternal. Only by having the righteousness of God can one escape this punishment. The way of escape is to believe Paul's gospel (1 Corinthians 15.1-4) that Christ died for our sins and rose from the dead. When trusts Christ's work on the cross and his resurrection rather than relying upon one's own righteousness God gives that person His own righteousness (Romans 3.21-22). On this basis, one can be assured that his name is in the Book of Life and that he will never experience this judgment. This passage is the most somber and sobering of all the Scriptures.

Revelation 21.27

Chapters 21-22 in Revelation describe a new heavens and a new earth (cf. Isaiah 65.17, 66.22-24; 2 Peter 3.13). The new heavens and new earth are eternal. This new state of being will require an entirely different physics. In our present universe time is integral to space and matter. In the new heavens and earth time will not exist. Hence, this future, new universe will consist of entirely new properties.

The Revelation concludes by describing that in the new heavens and new earth there will be no Temple, no sun, no moon. God

Himself will fill all in all with His presence and glory. Those who will participate in this new universe are those whose names are written in the Lamb's book of life.

²² I saw no temple in it, for the Lord God the Almighty and the Lamb are its temple. ²³ And the city has no need of the sun or of the moon to shine on it, for the glory of God has illumined it, and its lamp is the Lamb. ²⁴ The nations will walk by its light, and the kings of the earth will bring their glory into it. ²⁵ In the daytime (for there will be no night there) its gates will never be closed; ²⁶ and they will bring the glory and the honor of the nations into it; ²⁷ and nothing unclean, and no one who practices abomination and lying, shall ever come into it, but only those whose names are written in the Lamb's book of life (Revelation 21.27).

Conclusion

The scriptures examined above seem to indicate two different things regarding an individual and the Book of Life. On one hand, they seem to indicate every person begins life with his name in the Book of Life (Exodus 32.33; Deuteronomy 29.20; Psalm 69.28; Revelation 3.5). But on the other hand, two scriptures seem to indicate that the names of the lost are not recorded (Revelation 13.8, 17.8). What is correct? This is a matter in which is difficult if not impossible to reach a firm conclusion. The best course is to simply leave it in the Lord's hands. The important thing is to know one's own name is there. One can know his name is in the Book of Life by trusting in Paul's gospel (1 Corinthians 15.1-4). Those who have chosen not to believe Paul's gospel will stand before the Lord Jesus Christ with only their works and own righteousness to commend themselves to God rather than on Christ's work and His righteousness.

The Scriptures call the Book of Life the Lamb's Book of Life (Revelation 13.8, 21.27). Thus, it is the Lord Jesus Christ's book. He is the source of all life (John 1.4) and He gives life to whomever He wishes (John 5.21). All judgment is under His authority (John 5.22; Revelation 1.17-18). The greatest comfort one can have in this life is to know that his name is in the Book of Life.

¹ The word "anti" [ἀντί](#) carries the senses of "against" and "in place of." The Antichrist will be against Christ. But more, he will be in place of Christ. His whole program on earth will be to deceive humanity into believing that *he* is the Messiah sent from God (Matthew 24.24). This period of time will be the zenith of Satan's deception and power to rule the world. The whole world will worship Satan and the Beast (Revelation 13.3-4, 8).

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