

4.4 - Book of Life

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The ultimate purpose of the [Book of Life](#) is to record the names of those who have trusted in Jesus Christ for salvation and have His righteousness imputed to their account (Gen. 15:6; Rom. 3:22; 4:3, 6, 9, 11; 2Cor. 5:21). Since Christ's atoning sacrifice is the basis for redemption, it is also referred to as "the Lamb's Book of Life" (Rev. 13:8⁺; Rev 21:27⁺).

4.4.1 - Its Ultimate Purpose

Those whose names are written in the [Book of Life](#) are said to have their names "written in heaven" (Luke 10:20) or be "registered in heaven" (Heb. 12:23). This implies that the book is kept in heaven and this is where we find it in its ultimate use at the end of history: at the Great White Throne Judgment:

And I saw the dead, small and great, standing before God, and books were opened. And another book was opened, which is *the Book of Life*. And the dead were judged according to their works, by the things which were written in the books. These gave up the dead who were in it, and Death and Hades delivered up the dead who were in them. And they were judged, each one according to his works. Then Death and Hades were cast into the lake of fire. This is the second death. And anyone not found written in the Book of Life was cast into the lake of fire. (Rev. 20:12-15⁺)

This is the judgment which attends the second resurrection.¹ These are the resurrected dead who were *not* part of the first resurrection. *Over such the second death has power.* Their ultimate destiny is the Lake of Fire. Several books are involved in their judgement:

- **The Book of Life** - This book is consulted to verify they have *not* trusted in Christ and therefore must stand before God *on their own merit*. Since *the books*, which record their works, will indicate the presence of sin in their lives and that they have not been credited with the righteousness of Christ by trusting in Him, they have a major problem: they stand condemned as sinners before a Holy God and are now without recourse.
- **The Books** - These books record their life's works. Every good and bad deed of every moment of their life prior to death is recorded in these books. The degree of punishment is based upon their works (cf Mt 11:21-24⁺), but there is no possibility of rescue from the Lake of Fire which awaits because their name fails to appear in the **Book of Life**.

God is a just God and will provide unbelievers what they so frequently say they desire: the opportunity to be judged by their own merit. Their merit, falling short of perfection and lacking the covering of Christ, will result in just condemnation by degrees in the Lake of Fire. They will realize too late that God does not "grade on a curve."

4.4.2 - When are Names Written?

Several passages indicate that the names of the redeemed are written in the book *while they are still alive—prior to death* (Luke 10:20⁺; Php. 4:3⁺). An additional passage indicates that the names of those who worship the beast were **never recorded** in the book:

The beast that you saw was, and is not, and will ascend out of the bottomless pit and go to perdition. And those who dwell on the earth will marvel, whose **names are not written in the Book of Life from the foundation of the world**, when they see the beast that was, and is not, and yet is. (Rev. 17:8⁺) [emphasis added]

The phrase "**from the foundation of the world**" could be understood as describing either "the book" or the "names . . . written," emphasizing that either the [Book of Life](#) *itself existed* from the foundation of the world or that *the names have been absent* since then. If the former, the verse may only be conveying that the book has itself existed from the foundation of the world. If the latter, the verse would imply that the names of the redeemed were written from the foundation of the world. This latter meaning appears to be compatible with what is revealed concerning the election of the believer which took place "**before the foundation of the world**" (Eph. 1:4). When these facts are taken together, they indicate:

1. **The Book of Life existed before the foundation of the world.**
2. **According to the eternal electing purposes of God, the names of the redeemed were written in the book before the foundation of the world whereas the names of the beast worshipers were omitted.**

4.4.3 - Names Blotted Out

Having established that the names of the redeemed appear to have been recorded in the book at the time of their election (Eph. 1:4+), but that the names of the beast worshippers were not, we encounter a difficulty. Certain passages imply that names are **blotted out** (removed) from the book (Ex. 32:32-33+; Ps. 69:28; Rev. 3:5+; Rev 22:19+). But we've just seen that the names of the beast worshipers were not written in the book. **So who is it that is being blotted out?** If it were the redeemed that could be blotted out, then how does this square with predestination and God's electing purposes which result in the security of the believer? Various solutions have been proposed to reconcile the blotted names with what Scripture teaches elsewhere regarding the perseverance of the saints. We turn now to a brief survey of some of these. The question we want to answer is *who is it* that is "blotted out" from the [Book of Life](#)? The solution to the logical predicament attending the various passages regarding the Book of Life generally results in the proposal that Scripture describes at least two and as many as *three* books associated with life:

1. **Book of the Living** - A book which records all those who attain a long life physically. Being blotted out of this book results in premature *physical* death (Ex. 32:32-33+; Ps. 69:28).
2. **Book of Life** - A book which records the name of every individual ever born. Those who fail to exercise faith prior to death are "blotted out" of the book. Being blotted out of this book results in *spiritual* death and eternal damnation.
3. **Book of Life of the Lamb** - A book which records only those individuals who are predestined to salvation. None of the names written in this book is ever blotted out (Rev. 13:8+; Rev 21:27+).

It is our view that attempting to explain the various passages by using two or three different books is overly complicated and imposes distinctions between the books which are not derived strictly from the biblical text. We believe a simpler solution comes by understanding all these passages as describing the self-same book, but also recognizing the unique soteriological category of *those who dwell on the earth* in the last days and who worship the beast and take his mark. Rather than requiring two or even three books for logical consistency, all that is needed is a single book but two categories of people—where the earth dwellers of the end are treated uniquely from all other people of history. Let's take a look at some of the solutions which have been proposed for understanding all that Scripture teaches concerning the Book of Life.

4.4.3.1 - Book of the Living versus Book of Life

One solution which has been proposed is to understand *God's book, the book of the living* (Ex. 32:32-33; Ps. 69:28) as being a different book than the [Book of Life](#). Proponents of this view hold that this book records those who are afforded a full life due to righteousness. The sinner is then "blotted out" of the book by judgment resulting in his *physical* death. The remaining passage which indicates names may be blotted out (Rev. 3:5+) is seen as a literary device—coupled with a strong adversative—intended to illustrate the impossibility of being blotted out from the other book—the Book of Life.

Thomas suggests that John used a figure of speech known as a litotes. "Interpreters . . . could take the 'blotting out' as an example of litotes, a figure of speech in which an affirmative is expressed by the negative of a contrary statement. Coming by way of denial of the opposite, this is an understatement to express emphatically the assurance that the overcomer's name will be retained in the book of life."²

But understanding Christ's warning in Revelation 3:5+ as a figure of speech doesn't seem to do justice to the context:

The promise to the overcomer is an empty one unless the possibility exists that such a blotting out could occur. What incentive is furnished by being promised deliverance from something that could not happen? Furthermore, the psalmist prays for the blotting out of the names from the book of life (Ps. 69:28), and in so doing indicates that such is a distinct possibility. The "not blotting" referred to in this verse [Rev. 3:5+] must be more than a figure of speech.³

The difficulties attending this view are:

1. Moses' offer to be blotted out of God's book (Ex. 32:32) appears to be parallel to that of Paul (Rom. 9:3). This view trivializes Moses' offer to be blotted out with God's people (only involving physical death) and fails to recognize the parallel of Paul's comment in Romans which concerns *spiritual death*, not physical.
2. Understanding the warning of being blotted out in Revelation 3:5+ as a literary device doesn't do justice to the context of the letter to the church at Sardis.
3. The terms "book of the living" (Ps. 69:28) and "Book of Life" (Rev. 20:12+, 15+) are so similar as to call into question any view

which maintains they are different books.

4.4.3.2 - Lamb's Book of Life a Unique Book?

Another solution holds that the *Lamb's Book of Life* differs from the *Book of Life*. The *Book of Life* contains the names of every person who ever lived. Those who believe have their names retained in the book (Rev. 3:5+). Those who are unsaved are blotted out of the book (Ps. 69:28). Another book, the *Lamb's Book of Life* contains the name of every individual who is born again, and *only* those who are born again (Rev. 13:8+; Rev 21:27+). Names are never blotted out of this book.⁴The difficulties with this view are:

1. Taking these as two different books when their titles are so similar.
2. Allowing names to be recorded and blotted out in one book but never recorded in the second book when God's eternal election applies equally to both.
3. The beast worshipers are said to have never had their names written in the *Book of Life* (not the *Lamb's Book of Life*) in Revelation 17:8+.
4. Those who are not blotted out of the *Book of Life* are one and the same as those who are written in the *Lamb's Book of Life*. What then is the purpose of having two books if election applies to all the saved listed in both books and their ultimate destiny is exactly the same—the New Jerusalem (Rev. 21:27+; 22:19+)? Similarly, the result of being *omitted* from either book, either by never having been written in or by being blotted out, is essentially the same—eternal damnation (Rev. 20:15+).

4.4.3.3 - Beast Worshipers Blotted Out?

Another proposed solution is to understand Revelation 17:8+ as merely indicating that the *Book of Life* has existed from the foundation of the world and that the names of the beast worshipers "are not written" in the book *at the time of their worship of the beast*. Their names were previously recorded, but they had *already been blotted out*. Therefore, the names blotted out are the beast worshipers not the redeemed. This view recognizes the unlimited atonement of Christ (John 1:29; 3:16; 6:51; Rom. 5:18; 1Ti. 2:6; 4:10; Heb. 2:9; 1Jn. 2:2) and holds that Christ's atoning work established the *potential* that all men might be saved. Thus, the Book of Life initially contained the names of every individual who would ever be born.⁵

If the book of life contains the names of all those for whom Christ died (Caird), Christ must in some sense have died for all men because at the beginning the names of all men were in the book. In the words of Johannine theology outside the Apocalypse, He died for "the world," no one excluded (cf. John 1:29; 3:16; 4:42; 1 John 2:2; 4:14). This provision for eternal life for everyone is only potential, however. It becomes actual only when appropriated by each person. If a person experiences physical death, never having trusted Christ for forgiveness, his name is erased from the book of life.⁶

Those who are the elect, by definition, are never blotted out. Only the non-elect, as in the church at Sardis (Rev. 3:5+) are blotted out. A difficulty with this view is that the names of the beast worshipers which "are not written" is more accurately translated as names "not having been written" (γέγραπται [gegraptai], perfect tense) which implies that the names *never* were written to be subsequently blotted out. Moreover, another passage indicates the names of the beast worshipers were *never written*:

All who dwell on the earth will worship him, whose names have not been written in the Book of Life of the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world. (Rev. 13:8+)

We are closer to a solution here, but we still haven't explained how all of mankind could be recorded in the book with the unredeemed being blotted out at their death when two passages (Rev. 13:8+; 17:8+) explain that one category of the unredeemed, the beast worshipers, were never written in the book.

4.4.3.4 - Beast Worshipers are Unique

Another possible explanation is to understand the references to *God's book* (Ex. 32:32-33), *the book of the living* (Ps. 69:28), *the book* (Dan. 12:1+), the *Book of Life* (Php. 4:3; Rev. 3:5+; Rev 17:8+; Rev. 20:12+, 15+; Rev 22:19+), and the *Lamb's Book of Life* (Rev. 13:8+; Rev 21:27+) as all describing the same book. This book:

1. Records the names of all people to be born *with the exception of those who will worship the beast during the Tribulation*.
2. The names of the unsaved are blotted out of the book.
3. The names of the beast worshipers are uniquely omitted (Rev. 13:8+; Rev 17:8+).

The difficulty with this view is explaining why those who worship the beast are omitted from the book entirely rather than being written in and then blotted out with the rest of the unredeemed? Perhaps the answer can be found in the uniqueness of the historic role and attributes which attend this particular group of the unredeemed? As we noted elsewhere, the phrase "those who dwell on

the earth” is used in a very special sense in the book of Revelation—describing a moral category rather than a geographical position. Consider these facts concerning the earth dwellers:

- They directly worship Satan himself (Rev. 13:4⁺).
- They worship the beast who claims to be God (2Th. 2:4).
- They are provided with overwhelming evidence of God’s existence (Rev. 6:16-17⁺).
- They are afforded the benefit of hearing the gospel message from an angel (Rev. 14:6⁺).
- They are uniquely warned of the consequences of taking the mark by another angel (Rev. 14:9⁺).
- They continue in steadfast rebellion, all the while blaspheming God (Rev. 16:9⁺, 11⁺, 21⁺).
- Scripture uniquely records the irredeemable status of these who venture to take the mark of the beast (Rev. 14:9-11⁺) and the special status of those who resist (Rev. 14:13⁺; 20:4⁺).
- Their unique, irredeemable status is seen in God’s sending upon them a “strong delusion that they should believe the lie” (2Th. 2:11).
- The serious nature of their worship of the [Beast](#) can be seen in the unique treatment which they share with the Beast and the False Prophet, who deceives them to worship the Beast. The Beast and the [False Prophet](#) are cast into the Lake of Fire *without opportunity of judgment at the Great White Throne*. They are cast directly into the Lake of Fire at the Second Coming of Christ (Rev. 19:20⁺). Similarly, following Christ’s return, the *goats* among the nations—nonbelieving Beast worshipers who survive the Tribulation—are sent “into the everlasting fire prepared for the devil and his angels” (Mat. 25:31, 41). Their treatment appears to differ from the rest of the unsaved who are resurrected after the Millennial Kingdom to stand in judgment before the Great White Throne (Rev. 20:11-13⁺) prior to being cast into the Lake of Fire (Rev. 20:15⁺). See commentary on [Revelation 19:20](#).

Perhaps divine disgust for this ultimate global expression of human idolatry and blasphemy at the end of history will be the occasion for the total omission of any record of these individuals, the “earth dwellers” of the end (Rev. 21:4⁺).

4.4.3.5 - What about Election?

In our discussion, we saw passages which recognized the potential for persons to be blotted out of the [Book of Life](#) (Ex. 32:32-33; Ps. 69:28; Rev. 3:5⁺). Some have difficulty reconciling this with the security of the believer.⁷ But this is only a difficulty if it is possible for one of the *elect* to be blotted out of the book. If the names of all the living are written and those *who never attain salvation* are blotted out, then being blotted out does not correspond to *losing salvation*:

To assume that remaining in the book of life rests upon continuing loyalty to Christ ignores the fact that before all human faith or striving lie the divine choice and the divine initiative. The worthiness of the faithful . . . is based on divine grace (cf. Rev. 7:14⁺). It is incomprehensible that it could be lost through human unfaithfulness. Couple with these considerations the fact that Ps. 69:28 has the names of the wicked in the book of life, and the basis for an assumption that [being blotted out] refers to a loss of one’s salvation is eliminated.⁸

Thus, the warning Jesus gives to the church at Sardis (Rev. 3:5⁺) is an admonition to those who are not yet overcomers to become overcomers or else their names will be blotted out. The double negative found there, [ο_μ](#) [ou mē], indicates that those who overcome will *never be blotted out*—which is the substance of the promise Jesus makes.

Notes

¹See commentary on [Revelation 2:11](#) and commentary on [Revelation 20:12](#).

²Mal Couch, “Soteriology in the Book of Revelation,” in Mal Couch, ed., [A Bible Handbook to Revelation](#) (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Publications, 2001), 168.

³Robert L. Thomas, [Revelation 1-7](#) (Chicago, IL: Moody Press, 1992), 261.

⁴Arnold G. Fruchtenbaum, [The Footsteps of Messiah](#), rev ed (Tustin, CA: Ariel Ministries, 2003), 523-524.

⁵“The book of life, as its very name implies, probably contains the names of all those for whom Christ died—in other words, all who have ever been conceived in the womb.”—Henry Morris, [The Revelation Record](#) (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, 1983), Rev. 3:5.

⁶Thomas, [Revelation 1-7](#), 263.

⁷Concerning the security of the believer, see: Luke 10:20; 15:21; John 3:36; 5:24; 6:39, 47; 10:28-29; 17:12; Rom. 8:29-30; 1Cor.

1:7-8; 10:13; 2Cor. 1:21-22; Eph. 1:13-14; 4:30; Php. 1:6; 1Th. 5:23; 1Ti. 1:12; Heb. 7:25; 10:14; 1Pe. 1:3-5; 1Jn. 2:19; 5:13; Jude 1:1; 1:24; Rev. 7:4[±]; Rev. 14:1[±].

⁸Ibid., 261.

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