

# THE LAMB'S BOOK OF LIFE

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Books have been used from earliest times and, generally speaking, have served two purposes:

*a. They have recorded facts.*

Several books written for that reason are mentioned in the Bible. There is reference made, for example, to "the book of the wars of the LORD (Numbers 21:14) a book describing some of Israel's experiences in the wilderness; "the book of Jasher" (Joshua 10:13) - a book giving some account of Israel's heroes, together with their achievements; and "the book of the acts of Solomon" (1 Kings 11:41) - a book containing the public records of the kingdom. The keeping of books such as these evidently was not something peculiar to Israel, as we also read of "the book of the chronicles of the kings, of Media and Persia" (Esther 10:2; cf 2:23; 6:1).

*b. They have recorded names.*

When books have been used for that purpose, they might be described, more accurately, as registers. Nehemiah, the governor of the Jews, says: "I found a register of the genealogy of them which came up at the first, and found written therein, These are the children of the province..." (Nehemiah 7:5, 6). He is referring to a list of persons who returned from Babylon after the decree of Cyrus in 538 B.C. This same record receives a mention in the book of Ezra, where it is said that the genealogical tables were used as proof of priestly descent: "These sought their register among them that were reckoned by genealogy, but they were not found: therefore were they, as polluted, put from the priesthood" (Ezra 2:62). Allusion to such a roll of citizens is also found in the prophecy of Ezekiel: "They (i.e. the false prophets) shall not be in the assembly of my people, neither shall they be written in the writing of the house of Israel" (Ezekiel 13:9) This too seems to have been a general practice in ancient times. We know that the Romans kept the same kind of books. The gospel of Luke tells us that "there went out a decree from Caesar Augustus, that all the world should be taxed" (Luke 2:1), and that word "taxed" really means "enrolled."

The Bible teaches that *God has His "books"* (Daniel 7:10; Revelation 20:12)

This is not, of course, to be understood in a literal way. It simply means that God has given much thought to the things which happen in this world, especially such things as concern His church, and that He has, in His mind, the most detailed record of them.

That is true now, *in time*, for as they occur God observes them: "They that feared the Lord spake often one to another and the Lord hearkened, and heard it, and a book of remembrance was written before him for them that feared the Lord, and that thought upon His name" (Malachi 3:16). However, there is a sense in which that has been so from eternity, God having set down His sovereign purposes, before ever time began, all these details of history: "I saw in the right hand of him that sat on the throne a book written within and on the back side, sealed with seven seals" (Revelation 5:1).

Now in God's "books" there are:

*a. Facts*

- (i) "Then said I, Lo, I come: in the volume of the book it is written of me, I delight to do thy will, O my God: yea Thy law is within my heart." (Psalm 40:7,8). God observes and notes the obedience of His people; and, in fact, has predetermined it, including it in the roll of the divine decrees.

- (ii) "Thou tellest my wanderings: put thou my tears into thy bottle: are they not in Thy book?" (Psalm 56:8). All our troubles are noted down and remembered by God, and have been appointed for us.
- (iii) "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 yet there was none of them" (Psalm 139:16). Every detail of our bodies is known to God, the design of them being fixed in God's mind before we had any being.

#### *b. Names*

- (i) "Rejoice because your names are written in heaven" (Luke 10:20).
- (ii) "Fellow labourers, whose names are in the book of life" (Philippians 4:3).
- (iii) "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." (Revelation 3:5).

At this point care must be taken, or the result will be great confusion. There is more than one "book of life." In fact, according to the Scriptures, there are three such books:

#### (1) *The book of natural life.*

God has a record, as it were, of everybody who is alive, and when a man dies it is as if his name is removed from that list. To this book Moses referred. The people of Israel had fallen into idolatry and, as a consequence, three thousand of them had died. Moses interceded for them. He told God that he was willing to forfeit his own life if, by that means, the people might be spared: "Yet now, if thou wilt forgive their sin -; and if not, blot me, I pray thee, out of thy book which thou hast written" (Exodus 32:32; cf also Psalm 69:28).

#### (2) *The book of privileged life.*

God is very aware of all those who have been specially favoured, and He has a kind of register of them in His mind. He had a particular knowledge of Israel's families and tribes: "And it shall come to pass, that he that is left in Zion, and he that remaineth in Jerusalem, shall be called holy, even everyone that is written among the living in Jerusalem (Isaiah 4:3; cf also Psalm 81:5,6).

#### (3) *The book of eternal life.*

This is the book with which we are specially concerned in this study. God has made a list of all those who are the heirs of everlasting glory. The apostle John wrote of this list in connection with the eternal city: "There shall in no wise enter into it anything that defileth, neither whatsoever worketh abomination, or maketh a lie: but they which are written in the Lamb's book of life" (Revelation 21:27).

Having considered this introductory material, we can now give full attention to "the Lamb's book of life." Each word in the book's title should be carefully studied.

### **1. The Lamb's BOOK of life.**

The fact that the Scripture speaks of such a book means that God's people have been marked out by Him for the enjoyment of that life which shall never end; and this is what we mean when from now on we refer to "God's book."

#### I. God compiled the list of who should be saved before time began.

Certain names were there from the beginning, while others were not. This is the clear teaching of the Word of God. "They on the earth shall wonder, whose names were not written in the book of life *from the foundation of the world* (Revelation 17:8). Other scriptures confirm the truth that a certain and definite number of individuals were from eternity, embraced in God's saving purposes: e.g. "God hath from the beginning chosen you to salvation" (2 Thessalonians 2:13).

- a. From eternity God was concerned with the everlasting welfare of certain individuals: "He hath chosen us in Him before the foundation of the world ... having predestinated us ... to the praise of the glory of His grace" (Ephesians 1:4-6).
- b. He chose these out from the rest of mankind, separating them from all others in a wonderful act of love: "...not many wise men after the flesh not many, mighty, not many noble, are called: but God hath chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise ... that no flesh should glory in His presence" (1 Corinthians 1:26,27,29).
- c. Nothing was left to chance, for God not only desired their ultimate salvation, but actually purposed it: "Saved ... according to His own purpose and grace, which was given us in Christ Jesus before the world began" (2 Timothy 1:9).

II. It is said that "names" were written in God's eternal book. "To His disciples the Lord said: "Rejoice, because your *names* are written in heaven" (Luke 10:20).

- a. This informs us that election is of particular persons and not (as is sometimes assumed) of nations, or churches: "Salute Rufus chosen in the Lord" (Romans 16:13).
- b. It was an evidence of distinguishing grace, as many names were not included in the number of God's people: "Hath not the potter power over the clay, of the same lump to make one vessel unto honour, and another unto dishonour?" (Romans 9:21).
- c. The fact that their names were written down shows that God "knew" them in a very special way, which means that, He had affection for them: "The Lord knoweth them that are His" (2 Timothy 2:19).

III. There is more than a hint given here of one of the great ends God had in the choosing of such persons. It was customary once for there to be in famous cities (e.g., Florence) a book called "the book of gold." It contained a catalogue of names, and these were the names of the citizens of that particular city. In the same way, God's chosen, in the purposes of God, have been given a right to the eternal city. "Ye are come unto Mount Zion, and unto the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem ... to the general assembly and church of the firstborn, which are written in heaven" (Hebrews 12:22,23).

- a. In setting down their names in His book, God was, in effect, saying: These shall be citizens of heaven: "Come ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world" (Matthew 25:34).
- b. God is therefore said to have fixed our destination before ever we set out on the journey: "...we have obtained an inheritance, being predestinated...." (Ephesians 1:11).
- c. The gift of the New Jerusalem to the elect has been made most certain, God having, as it were, "put it in writing:" "It is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom" (Luke 12:32).

IV. There can be no doubt or confusion over the matter of who shall finally be saved. God has all their names registered. Christians may not always find it easy to remember one another (1 Corinthians 1:16), but even if the names of some escape us, yet we may be sure that God has not forgotten them: "I entreat thee also true yokefellow, help those women who laboured with me in the gospel, with Clement also, and with other my fellowlabourers, (unnamed by Paul), whose names are in the book of life" (Philippians 4:3).

- a. It is comforting to know that, although God chose His people before time, He never has them out of His mind: "...Yet will I not forget thee. Behold I have graven thee upon the palms of my hands; thy walls are continually before me" (Isaiah 49:15,16).
  - b. The saints may sometimes doubt their standing in God's grace, but however they doubt, there is no doubting of the matter so far as God is concerned: "...we have known God, or rather are known of God" (Galatians 4:9).
  - c. God's will with respect to each of the chosen is going to be done; and just as Pilate once said, "What I have written, I have written," so God is determined to abide by what He has (so to speak) "written:" "that the purpose of God according to election might stand ..." (Romans 9:11).
- V. The names of the chosen are said to be written in the book of God's decrees "in heaven:" "Rejoice, because your names are written in heaven" (Luke 10:20).
- a. Had those names been written "on earth" they would soon have disappeared, and it would indicate that those persons to whom the names belonged would perish (see: Jeremiah 17:13), but it is not so: "they shall never perish" (John 10:28).
  - b. It is impossible for man or devil to erase those names, and thus to rob God's people of their great inheritance: "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" (Romans 8:38,39).

## 2. The LAMB'S book of life:

There are important reasons why the book is so called, and space only permits us to mention those reasons briefly here. Very wonderful truths emerge at this point, and the reader would do well to consider the subject in further detail.

- I. When the sovereign choice of God was made, Christ was chosen first that He might be the Representative of all these appointed to life. From the very first He was considered and ordained as the Head of God's people, and that is why the Scripture says: "He hath chosen us in *him* before the foundation of the world" (Ephesians 1:4). The book is therefore called after the first name which appears in it.
  - a. The Bible refers to the eternal Son as "chosen:" "Behold, my servant, whom I uphold; mine elect, in whom my soul delighteth" (Isaiah 42:1; cf. 1 Peter 2:6).
  - b. By an eternal and immutable decree Christ was appointed to be our Representative: "Christ ... a lamb without blemish and without spot ... verily was foreordained before the foundation of the world..." (1 Peter 1:19,20).
  - c. The Son of God, speaking of Himself, says "I was set up (literally: "anointed" or "consecrated" to office) from everlasting" (Proverbs 8: 23).
- II. The Bible speaks of "the eternal covenant." By this it means that before time the Father and the Son entered into a solemn agreement together with a view to saving the elect. In the divine wisdom the responsibility for redeeming them was given to the Son of God, and He freely undertook to provide a redemption for them. It was as if the Father passed over to Him the book containing the names of all the chosen and He, receiving it, was destined to sacrifice Himself. Thus, in God's eternal decree of salvation Christ pledged Himself to die for the people of God. "The book of life of *the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world*" (Revelation 13:8).
  - a. The people of God were, from eternity, placed in the care of the Lamb: "My Father ... gave them me" (John 10:29).

- b. God never did think of us but as those whose guilt has been purged by the Saviour's blood: "Chosen in Him .... in whom we have redemption" (Ephesians 1:4,7).
- c. The glory for our salvation belongs therefore both to the Father who chose us and to the Son who redeemed us: "Salvation to our God which sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb" (Revelation 7:10)

III. This high-lights for us the amazing mercy of our God. Persons fallen and helpless, and in need of redemption, were chosen by the God of grace. "Vessels of *mercy*, which He had afore prepared unto glory" (Romans 9:23).

- a. If God had not written the names of a people in His book, all would have perished on account of their sin, for "whosoever was not found written in the book of life was cast into the lake of fire" (Revelation 20:15).
- b. Obviously God did not elect His people because He foresaw any good in them: He foresaw nothing but corruption. Therefore, it is "not according to our works but according to His own purpose and grace which was given us in Christ Jesus before the world began" (2 Timothy 1:9).
- c. In purposing their eternal well-being, God carefully secured it by making the ground of salvation the sacrificial death of His Son: "God hath not appointed us unto wrath, but to obtain salvation *by our Lord Jesus Christ*" (1 Thessalonians 5:9).

IV. Christ, the Lamb of God, was appointed to die only for those whose names were in that book. He was to be, the Redeemer of God's elect. "He is brought as a lamb to the slaughter .... For the transgression of *my* people was He stricken" (Isaiah 53:7,8).

- a. Christ has no favourites, but has loved and redeemed the whole company of His own: "Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down His life for *His friends*" (John 15:13).
- b. When He came into this world He had a fixed purpose - to atone for the sins of that company for whom He was responsible - and it is wonderful to think that He came just for our sakes: "This is my blood of the new testament which is shed for *many* for the remission of sins" (Matthew 26:28).

Never will it be said that Christ has in any way failed in His mission. If He had died for every man, the multitude finally in hell would prove that, whatever He had accomplished, He had succeeded only in part. That shall never be. "He shall see of the travail of His soul, and shall be satisfied" (Isaiah 53:11).

V. It is called "the Lamb's book of life" because that book is now in Christ's hands: "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" (Revelation 3:5)

- a. It is Christ, the Lamb, who has been given the task of working out the eternal purposes of God: "All things are delivered unto me of my Father." (Mathew 11:27) .
- b. To Him has been given the authority to bestow the "life," spiritual and eternal upon His people: "Thou hast given Him power over all flesh, that He should give eternal life to as many as thou hast given Him" (John 17:2).
- c. The book is with Him and He will ensure that no one is blotted out from it or fails to attain unto eternal life: "This is the Father's will which hath sent me, that of all which He hath given me I should lose nothing" (John 6:39).

### **3. The Lamb's book of LIFE:**

All those whose names were eternally written down in God's book have been marked out for the enjoyment of life in this world and in the world to come. Not mere existence: that is common to all. But the only life worthy of the name: the full, blessed and glorious enjoyment of God. "This is life eternal, that they might know thee, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom thou hast sent" (John 17:3).

We should all ask ourselves whether we know something of this "life" in our experience now, and if we have a sure and certain hope of the fullness of that "life" in heaven above.

One day, all God's decrees are going to be revealed. "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" (Revelation 20:12). What discoveries will then be made! It shall then appear who were elected, and who the people of God really are. Some, to their everlasting sorrow, will find themselves among those "not found written in the book of life." (Revelation 20:15). Others, to their unspeakable joy, will hear their names read out and published for all to hear, according to the promise of the Saviour: "I will not blot out his name out of the book of life, but I will confess his name before my Father, and before His angels" (Revelation 3:5).

Must that dreadful day come before we can know our eternal destinies? Is there no possibility of discovering what is in the book until then? There is a verse to which I would like to draw your attention before closing. "As many as were ordained to eternal life believed" (Acts 13:48). That word "ordained" might have been translated "inscribed" or "enrolled," for there is evidence to show that the word sometimes carried that meaning. What we have here is a clear statement from the Word of God informing us that those whose names are in the book of life come to believe in our Lord Jesus Christ.

The issue then becomes quite simple: have you and I realised that we are sinners before God, and have we been brought to trust in the Saviour for our everlasting salvation?

If we have, we may be sure that our names are written in heaven. If we have not - and this is very solemn - our spiritual state should be our greatest concern; and, without delay, we ought to believe in the Son of God. Then, and only then, shall we know that we have a place in the Lamb's book and in the Lamb's heaven.