

Is Your Name in the Book of Life?

By Sherwin McMichael

Shrouded in mystery through the ages, this book has an incredible significance that is now revealed! Your future depends on how you react to this knowledge.

Eternal life is promised to Christians. They are set apart as sons of God — legal heirs of the Kingdom of God. But how is this setting apart done? God is not the author of confusion. He has not left the records of those who are to inherit eternal life in haphazard disarray.

The legal recording of those who have become begotten sons of God is a real facet of God's plan of salvation. This recording process becomes fully clear only when one truly understands the God-ordained purpose for the *book of life*.

Mankind has not known God's intent for this book — most have never even known of its existence, and many who have seen it mentioned in the

Bible are confused as to its meaning and ignorant of its purpose.

Man's purpose revealed

It is God's desire to "have all men to be saved, and to come unto the knowledge of the truth" (I Tim. 2:4). This was the ultimate purpose from the beginning, and it has never changed. God intended that mankind be born into His Family before Adam was created. He intends it today and qualifying humans to share eternal God-life with Him will continue to be His unswerving purpose until everyone who has ever lived has had his chance to become God's son.

The prophet Daniel understood God's purpose for mankind. He wrote,

"And they that be wise shall shine as the brightness of the firmament: and they that turn many to righteousness [shall shine] as the stars for ever and ever" (Dan. 12:3).

This prophecy, which also mentions a terrible tribulation culminating in the Day of the Lord and the resurrection of the dead (verses 1-3), states that those who are to be delivered are "written in the book" (verse 1). This volume is the book of life. In other words, to be given eternal life and entrance into God's Kingdom, it is necessary to be found in this book.

Church being judged now

"For the time is come that judgment must begin at the house

[household or family] of God" (I Pet. 4:17). God's Church — and only His Church — is being tested and tried now in preparation for eternal life. But why are we being judged now? Why, of all the people in the world, is God deciding our qualifications for birth into His Family on the basis of our actions now? At what precise moment does eternity come to hang in the balance for the Christian?

Notice the example of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and the other servants of God. Christ did call some few people in the first 4,000 years of world history — and they did have their chance for salvation. These Old Testament servants of God were judged in their lifetimes. They, like us, had God's Holy Spirit and were His true people. But why? There is an important but often overlooked bond these people of bygone eons have in common with us today. A specific legal document determines when each servant of God officially begins his preparation for eternity.

"And there shall in no wise enter into it any thing that defileth, neither whatsoever worketh abomination, or maketh a lie: but they which are written in the Lamb's book of life" (Rev. 21:27). Here is the answer. Everyone who will ever live in the Kingdom of God as members of God's Family must have their names entered in this book!

Matthew 8:11 plainly says that Abraham, Isaac and Jacob will be in the Kingdom of God. They represent the faithful men and women in the past who were tested and who qualified for eternal life. They will become members of God's Family. Their names are in the book of life!

Now notice an experience in the life of Moses, another of the faithful few in the Old Testament. The people of Israel had committed a grievous sin against God, forsaking the covenant He so generously made with them. As a result, God was ready to punish by death the entire nation, as death is the penalty for sin (Rom. 6:23).

Moses, understanding the finality of Israel's punishment, went before God to plead for mercy for the nation. In doing so, he offered to relinquish his most precious possession —

the legal right to membership in God's Family.

"Oh, this people have sinned a great sin, and have made them gods of gold. Yet now, if thou wilt forgive their sin —; and if not, blot me, I pray thee, out of thy book which thou hast written" (Ex. 32:31-32).

Moses already had his name in the book of life. He recognized it to represent his legal right — if he remained faithful — to enter God's Kingdom that was much later to come to the earth.

Moses offered to substitute his opportunity for salvation to redeem the nation of Israel! God answered that this is not possible. God rejects no man, unless he personally chooses to reject God, "Whosoever hath sinned against me, him will I blot out of my book" (verse 33).

The New Testament likewise reveals the existence of this book. In giving various instructions to the church at Philippi, Paul enumerated several Christians "whose names are in the book of life" (Phil. 4:3).

God's plan to add members to His Family has always included the book of life. Explained to only a few, its purpose has remained hidden knowledge. However, God's elect in every age have known of the existence and solemn purpose of the book of life. Having your name in the book of life is the legal difference between eternal life and death!

Is it the Bible?

It is assumed by many that the book of life is just another name for the Bible. This explanation may satisfy the curiosity of some, but such conjecture is not scriptural. In the first place, it is self-evident that *all* the people who will be in the resurrection do not have their names written in the Bible.

Revelation 22:19 establishes a separate identity for these two books once and for all: "And if any man shall take away from the words of *the book of this prophecy* [the Bible], God shall take away his part out of the book of life."

Obviously, from the foregoing statements of Moses, Paul and John, who wrote Revelation, the book of life is a real book apart from the Bible. It must be taken seriously.

Whose names are included in the

book of life? When are these names registered? Can they be taken out? If so, how? And, just as important, whose names are *not* there?

When are God's sons named?

When does one become a member of God's Family?

Paul explained that God's begotten children are "sealed with that Holy Spirit of promise [of ultimately receiving eternal life], which is the earnest of our inheritance until the redemption of the purchased possession" (Eph. 1:13-14). The receiving of God's Spirit, this "earnest" payment, spiritually begets us as members of God's Family.

"For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God . . . the Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God" (Rom. 8:14, 16). We receive the Holy Spirit after a real repentance and baptism (Acts 2:38). So those who receive the Holy Spirit become begotten sons of God at that moment.

God's government is not tangled with confusion and needless bureaucracy. Christ keeps records, using the book of life in much the same way as communities keep civil records of births. It is an authoritative, legal record attesting that the names listed there designate begotten members of the royal Family, to be resurrected and born into eternal life at Christ's return.

God's book records, in effect, that a person has completely repented, come to *believe* Christ, been baptized and his sins forgiven, that he has received the Holy Spirit and that he is a begotten son of God. Each person's name is written into the book when he is begotten as a son of God.

Many people do not value baptism or the laying on of hands as they should, not fully realizing the sacred importance of this ceremony, nor that their names are being entered into the book of life. The angels in heaven rejoice when one sinner repents, is baptized, receives God's Spirit and is recorded in the book!

Exceptions to the rule

At this point, other scriptures, which may present questions as to when one's name is inscribed in the book of life, need explanation.

It is important to remember that

the book of life is specifically mentioned in scripture only 11 times. Every facet of its role in God's plan is not clearly revealed, and certainly, technical questions remain. Consequently, there appears to be exceptions to the general rule that one's name is recorded at reception of the Holy Spirit, but these do not alter the normal manner in which God deals with the overwhelming majority of His people.

One such exception may be the early New Testament apostles themselves. Notice Luke 10:20, where Christ tells them, "Rejoice not, that the spirits are subject unto you: but rather, because your names are written in heaven."

These men formed a group unique in all history. Christ dealt with them face-to-face during His earthly ministry, and their lives and work were to be the foundation of the New Testament Church. Apparently, their names may have been written in God's book before they received the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost, A.D. 31.

The apostle Paul presents another exceptional case. The Bible does not mention Paul in relation to the book of life, yet it does record that he was separated for God's service from birth (Gal. 1:15).

This may mean that Paul's name, too, was included in the book of life before receiving God's Spirit. Paul lived an unusual life in the service of God, and according to his own words, he was called to be an apostle "out of due time" (I Cor. 15:8).

One last scripture that may present a question is Revelation 17:8, "And they that dwell on the earth shall wonder, whose names were not written in the book of life from the foundation of the world."

Does this verse support the predestination of specific people from creation? No. The phrase "from the foundation of the world" does not refer to the *names*, but rather to *the book*. This scripture does not teach the general predestination of mankind, but simply reveals that the book of life has been in existence from the beginning.

Additional names to be entered

After the first resurrection, there is yet another time when this

book will be in use: "And I saw a great white throne... and I saw the dead, small and great, stand before God: and the books [the Bible] were opened: and another book was opened, which is the book of life" (Rev. 20:11-12).

The Great White Throne Judgment is the time salvation is offered to the billions of people who have never been called by God, and God has called very few during the last 6,000 years of earth's history. Any offer of life demands the presence of the book of life.

These multitudes never had a previous chance, never had their names in the book. Most people have lived and died never knowing of this book, much less being included in it. Salvation has never been generally offered to man — only to a select few in the Old Testament and to those whom God calls now. The vast majority of people have yet to be numbered in the book of life.

These are the ones to be brought back to physical life for the express purpose of being judged worthy or not worthy, by Christ, of receiving eternal life: "And the dead [brought back to life in the second resurrection] were judged out of those things which were written in the books [the Bible], according to their works" (verse 13).

The book of life being open at this time (verse 12) symbolizes that the opportunity to gain eternal life still exists for these uncounted billions! Additional names can be inscribed in the book of life when these people are brought to repentance and receive God's Spirit. And apparently, most will make the right choice when it is offered to them.

Can names be taken out?

Once a person has qualified to have his name inscribed in this special book, is it ever possible to have it removed? Unfortunately, though God's Word never fails, man may falter. One may not continue as a begotten member of God's Family if he willfully chooses the way of disobedience and death. Such a grievous sin will disqualify him to become a son of God.

Remember Paul's admonition! As a true Christian, his name was in the

book of life, yet he said, "I keep under my body, and bring it into subjection: lest that by any means, when I have preached to others, I myself should be a castaway" (I Cor. 9:27).

Yes, man can disqualify himself and lose out completely on God's wonderful promises. When one is granted repentance, is baptized and receives God's Holy Spirit, he receives his only chance of salvation. At that time, Christ places his name in the book of life — legal attestation that this person is a begotten son of God qualifying to be born into His Family. If the person rejects God's way of life, disqualifying himself, he forever loses this opportunity.

Notice: "Therefore... let us go on unto perfection... For it is impossible for those who were once enlightened, and have tasted of the heavenly gift, and were made partakers of the Holy Spirit... If they shall fall away, to renew them again unto repentance" (Heb. 6:1, 4, 6). A Christian's life is serious business.

If one commits this unpardonable, unrepentable sin, he has abandoned his opportunity to enter God's Kingdom. He has forsaken and lost God's Spirit. He is no longer a member of God's Church, and his name is blotted out of the book of life.

John explains, "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). If one commits the unpardonable sin, his name is to be blotted out of the book. This symbolizes the eternal punishment to be meted out to reprobate sinners in the lake of fire.

Christ is returning soon to govern this earth. At that time He will grant eternal life to all those from the time of Adam whose names are found written in His book!

Think of the privilege, the glory and the life God offers His begotten sons. His gift to man is membership in the Family of God, forever recognized in this great book of royal records. One's name in the book of life is a precious possession. It is the difference between life and death — for eternity. □