

Rev. 20:12a

I saw the dead, both great and small, standing before God's throne. And the books were opened, including the Book of Life.

Daniel 7:9-10

I watched as thrones were put in place and the Ancient One sat down to judge. His clothing was as white as snow, his hair like whitest wool. He sat on a fiery throne with wheels of blazing fire, and a river of fire flowed from his presence. Millions of angels ministered to him, and a hundred million stood to attend him. Then the court began its session, and the books were opened.

Books at the Day of Judgment

[The concept of "book," as mentioned in the Bible, is actually a reference to scrolls, which would consist of rolls of skin, papyrus, or similar materials. Sometimes they would be sealed, either to protect the contents, or to restrict what could be read (or to limit *who* could read it - compare to Revelation 5:2+). The modern concept of "book," multiple pages, normally bound together at the spine, did not come into existence until a later date.]

Scripture tells us, in Revelation 20:12, that our eternal condition will be determined by what is written in the "books of deeds" and the Book of Life.

The books of deeds contains a record of everything we have done, or will do, in this present life. These books will determine the extent of our reward or punishment, but they will *not* determine which kingdom we belong to.

The Book of Life is a record of everyone who belongs to Jesus, a registry of all people who are citizens of God's eternal kingdom. This book will determine each person's eternal destiny. Those whose names are written in it will have the right to live in the New Jerusalem. Those whose names are not written in it will be cast out of God's presence for eternity; they belong to the kingdom of darkness and will have no place in the light of God's presence.

As an aid to interpreting the following information, the words used to describe the book(s) are given at the beginning of each verse entry. Pay close attention to the context - both the immediate context around the verse, as well as the general context of who the verse was written to.

Books Related to Life or Citizenship

A. Comments About the "Book of Life" (Revelation 20:12)

1. From God's eternal perspective, he knew who his people were, even before the creation of the world (Ephesians 1:4). In contrast, people see things from a perspective that is limited to time and space. Though, from *God's* perspective, the Book of Life may be fixed and unchanging, from *our* perspective, it might seem that a name is being added, each time a person becomes a child of God. In addition, if we see someone abandon the faith, after they claimed to believe it, we would probably view it as a name being blotted out of the book. God, on the other hand, knew their hearts and was never surprised at their departure. (We may wonder if, from God's perspective, such people's names were *ever* in the book.)
2. It is possible to become filled with all kinds of speculation, regarding the specific details about how (and when) names get written into the Book of Life, or removed from it (assuming that they *can* get removed from it). God does not give us such information - probably because we don't need to know it! If we simply do what God tells us to do, summarized by the words "trust" and "obey," we are guaranteed that our names *will* be there. If we don't, we are guaranteed that, at the Day of Justice, our names *won't* be there. And that's all that matters!
3. We must be cautious, when we look at verses referring to God's "book." There are passages which do not specifically state that it is the "Book of Life," and some of these could refer to a different book. For example, God tells Moses that he would blot from his "book" the names of those who worshiped the golden calf (Exodus 32:32-33). Is this a reference to people whose names were written in the "Book of Life," or to people who agreed to the terms of the "Book of the Covenant" (Exodus 24:7), but who later broke those terms? Even when a passage appears to make reference to the "Book of Life" (as defined in Revelation 20:12), we must pay attention to the context, for different verses may refer to the book from different perspectives.

B. Historical Basis

1. The Bible contains many examples of lists of names. Genealogical records may list an individual's parents and offspring, as well as other important facts about the person. Other records may identify a person's position in the community, and whether or not he even is a part of the community.
2. Examples of such records
 - Various genealogical lists in the Bible. Examples - the first few chapters of 1 Chronicles (Old Testament) and Matthew 1:1-17 (New Testament).
 - Various other lists, such as David's "mighty men" (2 Samuel 23:8-39).

3. Specific references to names being present (or absent) in such records
 - An instance in which family records had become lost: The people's rights in the community could not be determined until a priest received instructions from God - Nehemiah 7:61-65. [This shows the importance of family records, within the context of Israel's covenant relationship with God.]
 - A reference to people who would one day be recorded as living in Jerusalem - Isaiah 4:3.
 - A reference to people who would one day be listed in the "register of the peoples," because they were "born in Zion" (or because they acknowledged the Lord as their God) - Psalm 87:6.
 - A group of people who would *not* be listed in the "register of the house of Israel" (a judgment against false prophets) - Ezekiel 13:9. [Could this be comparable to the idea of being "blotted out" of the records?]

C. Verses About the "Book of Life" (or a similar concept)

1. A general statement about the Book of Life (at the Day of Justice)
 - "BOOK OF LIFE" - It is a list of people who are citizens of God's eternal kingdom - Revelation 20:12.
 - ["THE BOOKS" - The Book of Life may be included among the "books" mentioned in Daniel 7:10.]
2. About those who's names *are* listed in this book
 - "BOOK OF LIFE" - An example of people who are listed in this book: Paul's "fellow-workers" - Philippians 4:3. [Compare to Philippians 3:20, which tells us that our "citizenship" is in heaven. The Book of Life would be a list of those citizens.]
 - "BOOK OF LIFE" - Only those on this list will be able to enter the New Jerusalem - Revelation 21:27.
 - "NAMES RECORDED IN HEAVEN" (probably in the Book of life, but the verse does not specify) - God's people should rejoice that their names are "written in heaven" - Luke 10:20. [This is more important than having the ability to cast out demons - see v. 17.]
 - "THE BOOK" - People whose names are written in it will be "delivered" - Daniel 12:1. [The focus of this passage appears to be the "end times" and judgment. Daniel 10:21, which mentions the "Book of Truth," may also be related to this.]
3. About those who's names *are not* listed in it
 - "BOOK OF LIFE" - Examples of people who will not be listed in this book: those who are willing to follow the "beast" (the ultimate representation of all that this world stands for) - Revelation 13:8 (they will worship him); 17:8 (they will be filled with awe when they see him).
 - "BOOK OF LIFE" - The final destiny of those not listed in this book is the lake of fire - Revelation 20:15.

4. About being "blotted out" (or *not* "blotted out") of the Book
 - "BOOK OF LIFE" - A promise for God's people (the "overcomers"): Their names will *not* be blotted out of the Book of Life. Instead, Jesus will "acknowledge" them in the Father's presence - Revelation 3:5. [See also Matthew 10:32 and Luke 12:8, about being acknowledged in God's presence.]
 - "BOOK OF LIFE" - David's prayer that his enemies' names might be blotted out of the book of the life, the record of the righteous - Psalm 69:28.
 - "BOOK OF LIFE" (KJV only) - Revelation 22:19. *KJV*: Those who subtract from "the words of the book of this prophecy" will have their part taken away from the *Book* of Life. *Most translations*: God will take their part away from the *tree* of life. [Regardless of one's choice of translation, they all tell us that the person will be excluded from God's presence.]
 - "THE BOOK YOU HAVE WRITTEN" - Those who have rebelled against God will have their names blotted out of this book, but those who have chosen to follow him won't - Exodus 32:32-33. [Is this a reference to the Book of Life? Or could it be a reference to the "Book of the Covenant" (Exodus 24:7) or something similar?]

 5. A reference to names being blotted out (or not blotted out) - the word "BOOK" is not specifically mentioned
 - Comments: Certain verses make reference to people (or their names) being blotted out (or not blotted out). This does not necessarily refer to having their names blotted from a *book* - the verses don't specifically say. In some cases, it could be a prayer or desire that they might be totally forgotten by future generations (because of how serious their sins were). Or it could simply refer to their judgment and destruction.
 - A reference to various people (or groups), whose names could/would be blotted out from under heaven: Deuteronomy 9:14 (Israelites who had rebelled - compare to Exodus 32:31-34, a parallel passage, where God's "book" is mentioned); 25:19 (the memory of Amalek, because of the evil things the Amalekites did); 29:20 (any Israelite who abandoned the covenant/agreement that he/they had made with God); Psalm 9:5 (the wicked).
 - One group which God did *not* say he would blot out: Israel - 2 Kings 14:27. [This focuses on Israel as a *group*. In the verses mentioned above, we see that individual Israelites *could* be blotted out.]
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Books Related to the Deeds People Have Done

A. Comments About the "Books of Deeds" (Revelation 20:12)

1. Many of the things mentioned concerning the Book of Life could be stated about these books. For example, nothing that we will ever do is a surprise to God. From the beginning of time, God knew what we would do. (He also knew what *Jesus* would do on the cross, to bring forgiveness and restoration to those who put their trust in him.) Yet from *our* perspective, the events in these books may be thought of as being written at the time we do them.
2. Some passages refer to sins being "blotted out" (or not being "blotted out"), but the word "book" is not specifically mentioned. Are these verses a reference to the "book of deeds" (or a similar book)? If they are, it *cannot* mean that those "blotted" actions never occurred, but that they would not be counted against the person.
3. We do not have to "worry" about the specific details of how the events in our lives become recorded in the books. All we need to do is to trust and obey God... and he will take care of the rest!

B. Historical Basis

1. The Bible contains many examples of records or "chronicles," which describe various people's deeds.
2. Examples of such records
 - Various historical records found in the Bible. Examples - 1 and 2 Kings (Old Testament) and the gospels (New Testament).
 - Various records that the kings of Israel and Judah kept. (These records are no longer in existence, but they are mentioned several times in the Old Testament.) Examples - 1 Kings 14:19, 29, etc.
3. A specific instance in which a person was rewarded, based on what was written in such an account - Esther 6. [The king rewarded Mordecai for exposing a plot to assassinate him.]

C. Verses about the "books of deeds" (or a similar concept)

1. A general statement about the books at the Day of Justice
 - "BOOKS" - These books will form the basis of our rewards or punishment - Revelation 20:12.
 - ["THE BOOKS" - These books are probably among the books mentioned in Daniel 7:10.]

2. Specific events recorded in the books before they happened (from God's perspective)
 - "YOUR BOOK" - All of our days were recorded in God's book, before we were born - Psalm 139:16.
 - THE "BOOK OF TRUTH" - A prophetic record of all that would happen - Daniel 10:21. [Beginning in Daniel 11:2, certain details of this truth are mentioned, with a focus on Israel's future. (This book may also include names, if this is the same book as is mentioned in Daniel 12:1.)]

3. God's "books" mentioned as a source of encouragement for his people, when they found themselves in difficult circumstances
 - "YOUR BOOK" - David, being alone and surrounded by enemies, describes his tears as having been recorded on God's scroll/record - Psalm 56:8. [A prayer for mercy and deliverance.]
 - THE "SCROLL OF REMEMBRANCE" - God said he would remember the righteous, those who continued to fear and honor him - Malachi 3:16. [They will be spared from judgment, and will be God's "treasured possession." (The context: Others were turning against God, claiming that it was a waste of time to serve him.)]

4. A reference to deeds being blotted out (or not blotted out) - the word "BOOK" is not specifically mentioned
 - A desire for deeds to *not be* blotted out (perhaps expressing a desire that they wouldn't be forgotten by God) - Nehemiah 13:14 (Nehemiah's faithful deeds); 4:5 (his enemies' sinful deeds).
 - A desire for deeds or actions to *be* blotted out - Psalm 51:1. [David's prayer that his sins would be blotted out by God. He asked God to not hold them against him. (Compare to Psalm 130:3. *Nobody* could stand, with such a list against them... but forgiveness *is* available! God won't use such a list against those who have been forgiven.)]

Comments and Observations

About the Book of Life and the Books of Deeds

1. Verses about these books focus on a limited range of issues. To get the full picture, we must take into consideration the rest of Scripture. (Some of the issues, which have an impact on our understanding of these books, are mentioned below.)

2. The Book of Life is related to *grace, faith* and *salvation*. The books of deeds are related to *works*. The one focuses on what *God* does (he saves us and changes us); the others on what *we* do (we live-out our lives and we show by our choices whether or not a change has taken place in us).

3. It is folly for us to try to *work* for our salvation. To do so is to confuse the purpose of the books. Works are *not* the focus of the Book of Life!
4. People whose names are written in the Book of Life are citizens of God's kingdom. They have left the kingdom of darkness and now belong to the kingdom of light (Colossians 1:12-13). Along with this change in *kingdom* comes a change in *nature*: We have become "new creations" (2 Cor. 5:17; Galatians 6:15). As we submit to the Word of God, we develop new values which influence our conduct - both the types of things we do, as well as the motivations we have for doing them. The things we do will begin to change, for we will have an increased desire to do things which express love for God and love for neighbor. What all this means is this: *The presence of our names in the Book of Life will have an influence on our actions, as recorded in the books of deeds.*
5. The Book of Life and the books of deeds will *not* contradict each other, since having one's name in the Book of Life is associated with having a changed nature. A person *cannot* have a lifestyle characterized by a disregard for God and his moral values, and still have a good reason for expecting his name to be in the Book of Life. Nor can a person live a life of love, the kind of love that comes from God, and find himself *excluded* from the Book of Life. (This is a love which puts the honor of God and the good of other people ahead of personal interests.) It is for good reason that Scripture tells us, "by their fruit you will recognize them" (Matthew 7:16, 20; 12:33; Luke 6:44; James 3:12). This "fruit" is determined by both what we *do*, and what we are *not willing to do* (James 4:17).
6. A person whose name is in the Book of Life will *not* be totally perfect and free from sin (James 3:2a; 1 John 1:8-10). Our spiritual life *grows* (1 Peter 2:2; 2 Peter 3:18; 2 Thessalonians 1:3). Though it will not occur all at once, there will be a distinct (and ongoing) shift away from the devil's values and toward what God values. (On the other hand, an unwillingness to grow spiritually is a good indicator of the *absence* of spiritual life. A continued lack of growth strongly suggests a lack of life - and it is most foolish to ignore this fact.)
7. All of this shows the importance of what we do - our *works*. However, we don't go around boasting about our accomplishments, for the very works we do were *made* (or created) for us to do, by *God* (Ephesians 2:10). He is the one who gave us both the *ability* and the *desire* to do them (Philippians 2:12-13). If we want to boast or rejoice in something, we should boast in what *God* has done - and the fact that he has written our names in heaven (Luke 10:20) - rather than in our own abilities or accomplishments.
8. If we are willing to trust and obey God, we have *no reason* to fear that our names will be blotted from the Book of Life (Revelation 3:5). On the other hand, if we are *not* willing to trust and obey God, we have *every reason* to fear that our names won't be there.

9. The books of deeds prove that our works are important. Even the smallest act of kindness, if done for Jesus, will be rewarded at the Day of Justice. (Compare to Matthew 25:31-46). On the other hand, what we may consider the smallest, "least significant" sin will be shown for what it is: totally evil, compared to God's righteous standard. (Compare to Matthew 12:36; 1 Timothy 5:24-25; Ecclesiastes 12:14). *Everything* will be exposed and shown for what it is.
10. The books of deeds are an encouragement for us to *not* give up, when circumstances become difficult for us. God will remember our trials and tears, if we are willing to endure them for his sake.
11. The books of deeds are a warning for the wicked, that they *cannot* get away with sin - and choosing to ignore this warning *cannot* prevent the Day of Justice from coming.