

Notes: September 16, 2023 (Rosh Hashanah)

Start: 10 AM

Introduction: Rosh Hashanah – The Books

Growing up, when we went to synagogue on Rosh Hashanah, it was an evening service, the sanctuary was packed, both annexes were full and they had speakers in the hallway for those who could not get a seat.

The atmosphere was

You would see people that you hadn't seen in weeks or even months. This was a time when those in the community who attended this synagogue reconnected.

Rosh Hashanah isn't a social time but it was a time when you saw what it meant to be part of a synagogue.

The Rosh Hashanah service was something as a child I actually liked the most. Mostly because of the shofar being blown. As young as I was, I didn't recall, relate or even understand the Rabbi's sermon, primarily because the best part was over.

However, there is one thing that I do recall being mentioned on Rosh Hashanah and that was about the books.

We were taught that there were three books that were opened on Rosh Hashanah...

The book of the Righteous (also known as the book of the living)

The book of the Wicked (also known as the book of the dead)

There was even something mentioned about a book of the "in between"

The Targum (*Isa. iv. 3; Ezek. xiii. 9*) speaks of the "Book of Eternal Life." Temporal life is apparently prayed for in the liturgical formula: "Inscribe us in the Book of Life" (see Atonement, Day of).

The **targumim** were spoken paraphrases, explanations and expansions of the Jewish Scriptures that a rabbi would give in the common language of the listeners, which during the time of this practice was commonly, but not exclusively, Aramaic.

The Mishnah tells us that the deeds of every human being are recorded in a book (*Avot, ii. 1; see iii. 16*).

*The Book of Jubilees, is an ancient Jewish religious work of 50 chapters, considered canonical by the Ethiopian Orthodox Church as well as Beta Israel (Ethiopian Jews). Jubilees is considered one of the pseudepigrapha and speaks of two heavenly tablets or books: a Book of Life for the righteous, and a Book of Death for those that walk in the paths of impurity and are written down on the heavenly tablets as adversaries (of God). Also, one who contrives evil*

against his neighbor will be blotted out of the Book of Remembrance of men, and will not be written in the Book of Life, but in the Book of Perdition.

**Dan 7:9** "As I watched, thrones were set in place; and the Ancient One took his seat. His clothing was white as snow, the hair on his head was like pure wool. His throne was fiery flames, with wheels of burning fire.

**Dan 7:10** A stream of fire flowed from his presence; thousands and thousands ministered to him, millions and millions stood before him. Then the court was convened, and the books were opened.

Also referenced in *Enoch* 47:3 - "And in those days I saw the Head of days, as he sat upon the throne of his glory, and the books of the living were opened before him, and his whole host, which is in high heaven and around him, stood before him."

Yet when I became a believer the book referenced in Revelation 20:12 was called "the Lamb's Book of Life" in reference to Yeshua as the lamb of God and referenced 10 times in Revelation.

With the emphasis being if your name isn't written in the book you would be going to hell.

And, once your name was written in the book it was sealed and couldn't be removed.

### **Books... another book, the Book of Life.** (Sefer-chayim)

There seem to be two elements in the Final Judgment.

First, there is judgment for eternal salvation (Revelation 20:5) or damnation (Revelation 20:14-15) on the basis of being written in the Book of Life.

Second, there is judgment according to works **from what was written in the books** (plural); this concept appears in the *Tanakh* at Daniel 7:9-10:

**Dan 7:9** "As I watched, thrones were set in place; and the Ancient One took his seat. His clothing was white as snow, the hair on his head was like pure wool. His throne was fiery flames, with wheels of burning fire.

**Dan 7:10** A stream of fire flowed from his presence; thousands and thousands ministered to him, millions and millions stood before him. Then the court was convened, and the books were opened.

From these books God judges all our deeds (Romans 2:6), both public and secret, and even our innermost thoughts (see Revelation 20:11 - 15). For the saved this judgment determines rewards (1 Corinthians 3:8 - 15), while for the lost it determines degrees of punishment (Luke 12:47-48).

There is even a third aspect as found in traditional Judaism - yet another meaning to these **books**.

they determine what a person will experience in this world, not in the world to come.

The Hebrew term "*sefer-chayim*" ("book of life," "book of the living") appears in the *Tanakh* only at Psalm 69:28-29:

"Add iniquity to their iniquity,  
don't let them come into Your righteousness.  
Let them be blotted out of the book of life  
And not be written with the righteous."

(Incidentally, this is a continuation of the passage quoted at Romans 11:9-10.)

The first reference to any such book belonging to Adonai is found in Exodus 32:32-33:

**Exo 32:32** Now, if you will just forgive their sin! But if you won't, then, I beg you, blot me out of your book which you have written!"

**Exo 32:33** Adonai answered Moshe, "Those who have sinned against me are the ones I will blot out of my book.

It is after the Israelites made the golden calf, Moses prayed that God would forgive them for this great sin, "and if not, then I pray that you blot me out of your book which you have written" (compare what Sha'ul writes at Romans 9:2 - 4). *Adonai's* response to Moses was, "Whoever has sinned against me, him will I blot out of my book."

Other places in the *Tanakh* referring to a book containing individual destinies in the *'olam haba* (the world to come) are Malachi 3:16 ("a book of remembrance was opened") and Daniel 12:1 ("every one whose name shall be found written in the book"); while Psalm 139:16 ("your book") seems to refer to the *'olam hazeh* (*this world*). In the New Covenant the term "Book of Life" appears at Philippians 4:3 and Hebrews 12:23, as well as six times in Revelation 3:5, 13:8, 17:8, 20:12, 20:15 and 21:27, always signifying eternal salvation.

I have already mentioned a few references in other Jewish literature in the Pseudepigrapha yet there are still others found again in (Jubilees 30:22, which mentions a second book, the book of those who will be destroyed, with the possibility of having one's name transferred to it from the Book of Life; 1 Enoch 104:7; 108:3, 7) and in early Christian literature (Vision of Hermas 1:24, Similitude 2:12). In the Mishna it is spoken of in Pirkey-Avot 2:1..

From God's answer to Moses in Exodus, together with Revelation 3:1 - 5:

**Rev 3:1** "To the angel of the Messianic Community in Sardis, write: 'Here is the message from the one who has the sevenfold Spirit of God and the seven stars: "I know what you are doing — you have a reputation for being alive, but in fact you are dead!

**Rev 3:2** Wake up, and strengthen what remains, before it dies too! For I have found what you are doing incomplete in the sight of my God.

**Rev 3:3** So remember what you received and heard, and obey it, and turn from your sin! For if you don't wake up, I will come like a thief; and you don't know at what moment I will come upon you.

**Rev 3:4** Nevertheless, you do have a few people in Sardis who have not soiled their clothes; and they will walk with me, clothed in white, because they are worthy.

**Rev 3:5** He who wins the victory will, like them, be dressed in white clothing; and I will not blot his name out of the Book of Life; in fact, I will acknowledge him individually before my Father and before his angels.

Through these passages, we learn that it is possible to fall from grace, to have one's eternal destiny changed from salvation to condemnation, in consequence of unrepented sin in one's life, even though such passages such as Ephesians 1:3 - 14 and 1 Peter 2:9 are used to convey that salvation is predestined and can not be lost.

We appear have a contradiction with Scripture.

But is there really a contradiction in Scripture or a contradiction in our understanding?

One way to deal with this contradiction is to suppose that everyone's name is initially written in the Book of Life. Let's go back to Moses response to Adonai in Exodus 32:

**Exo 32:32** Now, if you will just forgive their sin! But if you won't, then, I beg you, blot me out of your

book which you have written!"

So, in going from the premise that we start off in the book of Life, we can then reconcile the following:

- Babies / children who die before the age of accountability go to paradise.
- Upon reaching the age of accountability, everyone sins, as I had conveyed on Shabbat when I closed with Romans 3:20 - 31; and only those who turn to God through Yeshua the Messiah (John 14:6) can know that they are truly in the book and are saved.
- A name is not removed from the Book of Life unless the person has committed the unpardonable sin, the sin against the Holy Spirit, of finally and definitively rejecting God and his Son Yeshua (Matthew 12:32).
- Upon one's death, their fate is then sealed regarding the book that their name is in. Based on their life's time frame to decide whether Yeshua was the way the truth and the life and that no one could approach Avinu Malkenu except through Him.

The term "book of life" finds a prominent place in the liturgy for the High Holy Days. Thus the final blessing of the *'Amidah* is expanded so as to conclude:

"May we and all your people, the house of Israel, be remembered and inscribed in the book of life, blessing, peace and prosperity, so that we will have a life of goodness and peace. Blessed are you, *Adonai*, the maker of peace."

It is for these reasons that we are to be even more mindful that everyone is to face God's judgment. Although God is a God of mercy, he is also a God of justice whom places judgment. This is taught equally by the *Tanakh*, the New Covenant, and Jewish tradition.

**Exo 32:33** Adonai answered Moshe, "Those who have sinned against me are the ones I will blot out of my book.

Yet the understanding of Adonai's mercy is left solely in His hand...

**Exo 33:19** He replied, "I will cause all my goodness to pass before you, and in your presence I will pronounce the name of Adonai. Moreover, I show favor to whomever I will, and I display mercy to whomever I will.

Sha'ul quoting this verse in Romans 9:15, brings into focus God's mercy along with his sovereignty and justice. Though God is within his rights to hate whom he will, so that standing with God **doesn't depend on human desires or efforts**, God nevertheless does have **mercy** and does show **pity**.

The Prophets speak of this judgment as the Day of *Adonai*:

- Isaiah 2:12, 13:6:13 (a verse of which is alluded to in Matthew 24:29)
- Ezekiel 30:3
- Joel 1:15, 2:1, 3:4 (quoted at Acts 2:20, Revelation 4:14)
- Amos 5:18-20
- Obadiah 1:15
- Zephaniah 1:17-18
- Zechariah 14:1 - 9
- Malachi 4:5 (alluded to at Matthew 17:10 - 11).

"The prominent feature of these passages is a dramatic sense of doom, underlined by a few

characteristic motives, such as a darkness and wailing.... The warning is given that the Day of the Lord is near .... The wicked will be punished, justice established, mankind confounded, and its destiny somehow definitely changed .... God... act-suddenly, decisively, and directly, in a single day, with vehemence and terror." (*Encyclopedia Judaica* 5:1387-8)

In the New Covenant can be found the terms "Day of God" (2 Peter 3:12), "Great Day of *Adonai-Tzva'ot*" (Revelation 16:14), Day of the Messiah Yeshua (Philippians 1:6, 1:10, 2:16), and to those who have not fully embraced the Tanakh, the ambiguous phrase, "Day of the Lord," usually understood to refer to the first day of the week, the day of His resurrection, while it actually means either "Day of *YHVH*" or "Day of the Lord [Yeshua the Messiah]" again is referring to the day of judgment.

Moreover, God judges not only outward deeds, but the inner man. In the New Covenant we see this when Yeshua confronts the *P'rushim* (Luke 12:1 – 5, Matthew 23:23 – 28) and in the whole tenor of his Sermon on the Mount (Mattityahu 5-7).

The *Tanakh* too speaks of secret deeds and motives when it says: "God will bring every work into judgment, concerning every hidden thing, whether it be good or evil" (Ecclesiastes 12:14).

Compare also Psalm 139.

**Psa 139:1** [*For the leader. A psalm of David:*] Adonai, you have probed me, and you know me.

**Psa 139:2** You know when I sit and when I stand up, you discern my inclinations from afar,

**Psa 139:3** you scrutinize my daily activities. You are so familiar with all my ways

**Psa 139:4** that before I speak even a word, Adonai, you know all about it already.

**Psa 139:5** You have hemmed me in both behind and in front and laid your hand on me.

**Psa 139:6** Such wonderful knowledge is beyond me, far too high for me to reach.

**Psa 139:7** Where can I go to escape your Spirit? Where can I flee from your presence?

**Psa 139:8** If I climb up to heaven, you are there; if I lie down in Sh'ol, you are there.

**Psa 139:9** If I fly away with the wings of the dawn and land beyond the sea,

**Psa 139:10** even there your hand would lead me, your right hand would hold me fast.

**Psa 139:11** If I say, "Let darkness surround me, let the light around me be night,"

**Psa 139:12** even darkness like this is not too dark for you; rather, night is as clear as day, darkness and light are the same.

**Psa 139:13** For you fashioned my inmost being, you knit me together in my mother's womb.

**Psa 139:14** I thank you because I am awesomely made, wonderfully; your works are wonders - I know this very well.

**Psa 139:15** My bones were not hidden from you when I was being made in secret, intricately woven in the depths of the earth.

**Psa 139:16** Your eyes could see me as an embryo, but in your book all my days were already written; my days had been shaped before any of them existed.

**Psa 139:17** God, how I prize your thoughts! How many of them there are!

**Psa 139:18** If I count them, there are more than grains of sand; if I finish the count, I am still with you.

**Psa 139:19** God, if only you would kill off the wicked! Men of blood, get away from me!

**Psa 139:20** They invoke your name for their crafty schemes; yes, your enemies misuse it.

**Psa 139:21** Adonai, how I hate those who hate you! I feel such disgust with those who defy you!

**Psa 139:22** I hate them with unlimited hatred! They have become my enemies too.

**Psa 139:23** Examine me, God, and know my heart; test me, and know my thoughts.

**Psa 139:24** See if there is in me any hurtful way, and lead me along the eternal way.

The Oral *Torah* affirms this:

"Rabbi [Y'hudah HaNasi, 135-219 C.E.] said, '... Pay attention to three things and you will not come under the power of transgression, know what is above you:

- An all-seeing eye,
- An all-hearing ear, and
- All your deeds recorded in a book' " (Avot 2:1)

So there is no room either for the common misunderstanding on the part of both Christians and Jews that the Tanakh portrays God as stern, judgmental and lacking mercy, while the New Covenant pictures Him as so merciful that He overlooks judgment and even justice.

Then there is the opposite mistake of thinking that the New Covenant, with its talk of hellfire, focuses on judgment more than the *Tanakh*.

When people realize that it is one coherent revelation of Adonai with one not contradicting the other and vice versa, then the true power of Adonai's Word will be felt.

Quoting Hosea 10:8,

**Hos 10:8** Destruction will come to the high places of Aven, that is, to the sin of Isra'el. Thorns and thistles will grow over their altars; and they will say to the mountains, "Cover us!" and to the hills, "Fall on us!"

Depicts how the inhabitants of Samaria will feel when God judges them by having Assyria carry them away, Yeshua warns that the Day of God's judgment will be fearful:

**Luk 23:30** Then They will begin to say to the mountains, 'Fall on us!' and to the hills, 'Cover us!'

So, it is at this time that we are instructed to be joyful, even as we hear the sound of the shofar that warns us that Yom Kippur's time is close. God's Day of Judgment is close. Yet we are able to freely rejoice in knowing that Yeshua has made atonement for us.

So, why do we need to concern ourselves with Yom Kippur as believers?

Come back on Yom Kippur and you will find out what it means for believers who have already accepted Yeshua as messiah, as the Passover Lamb, who atoned for the sins of the world.