**THE EXPOSITION OF HOLY SCRIPTURE BY ALEXANDER MACLAREN**

**JEREMIAH-014. TWO LISTS OF NAMES by ALEXANDER MACLAREN**

*"They that depart from Me shall be written in the earth."*

*Jeremiah 17:13*

*"Rejoice that your names are written in heaven."*

*Luke 10:20*

A name written on earth implies that the bearer of the name belongs to earth, and it also secondarily suggests that the inscription lasts but for a little while. Contrariwise, a name written in heaven implies that its bearer belongs to heaven, and that the inscription will abide.

We find running throughout Scripture the metaphor of books in which men's names are written. Moses thought of a book which God has written, and in which his name was enrolled. A psalmist speaks of the book of the living, and Isaiah of those who are written among the living in Jerusalem. Ezekiel threatens the prophets who speak lies in Jehovah's name that they shall not be written in the writing of the house of Israel. The Apocalypse has many references to the book which is designated as the Lamb's book of life, and which is opened at the final judgment along with the books in which each man's life-history is written, and only they who are written in the Lamb's book of life enter into the city that comes down out of heaven.

**I. The principle on which the two lists are made up.**

It is commonly supposed that the idea of unconditional predestination is implied in the writing of the names in the book of life. There is nothing in the figure itself to lead to that, and the text from Jeremiah suggests, on the contrary, that the voluntary attitude of men to God determines their being or not being inscribed in the book of heaven, since it is they who depart from God whose names are written on earth.

Then, since in the New Testament the book of life is called the Lamb's, we are led to think of Christ as writing in it, and hence of our faith in Him as being the condition of enrolling our names.

**II. The significance of the lists.**

They are lists of the living and of the dead.

True life is in fellowship with God. The other is the register of the burials in a graveyard.

They are lists of the citizens of two cities.

The idea is that the one class have relations and affinities with the celestial, are fellow-citizens with the saints, and have heaven as their metropolis, their mother city. Therefore they are but as aliens here, and should not wish to be naturalised. The other class are citizens of the earthly, belonging to the present, with all their thoughts and desires bounded by this visible diurnal sphere.

They are lists of those who shall be forgotten, and their works annihilated, and of those who shall be remembered and their work crowned.

The names written on earth are swiftly obliterated, like a child's scrawl on the sand which is washed away by the next tide, or covered up by the next storm that blows about the sand-hills. What a contrast is that of the names written on the heavens, high up above all earthly mutations!

In one sense oblivion soon seizes on us all. In another none of us is ever forgotten by God, but good and bad alike live in His thought. Still this idea of a special remembrance has place, as suggesting that, however unnoticed or forgotten on earth, God's children live in the true Golden Book. Their names are in the book of life. Of so much fame, in heaven expect the meed. Ay, and as, too, suggesting how brief after all is the honour that comes from men.

Also, there will be annihilation or perpetuation of their life's work. Nothing lasts but the will of God. Men who live godless lives are engaged in true Sisyphean labour. They are running counter to the whole stream of things, and what can be left at the end but frustrated endeavours covered with a gloomy pall?

Is your life to be wasted?

They are lists of those who are accepted in judgment, and of those who are not.

Rev. 20:12, 15; 21:27.

The books of men's lives are to be opened, and also the book of life. What is written in the former can only bring condemnation. If our names are written in the latter, then He will confess our names before His Father and the holy angels. And He will joyfully inscribe them there if we say to Him, like the man in Pilgrim's Progress, Set down my name. He will write them not only there, but on the palms of His hands and the tablets of His heart.