THE QUESTION

What did early Christians mean by the "book of the living"?

Asked by a THF member on April 19, 2026 · published November 9, 2026 · 6 numbered quotations · the 18 early Christian passages and 210 Bible verses we kept are listed at the back, each with a link.

Read it online: thehistoricfaith.com/early-church-questions/what-did-early-christians-mean-by-the-book-of-the-living

The short answer *Interpretation: our reading of the passages, not their words*

The book of the living is God's record of those who belong to Him and share His life. Early writers met the phrase in Moses' prayer after the golden calf and in Psalm 69. They link it to the book of life, where believers' names are written, and they warn that sinners can be blotted out.

LIBRARY ONLY	This study was written only from The Historic Faith's library of early-Christian writings and the Bible, never from the web. Every passage we kept from what the library gave is listed at the back, with a link to read it.
HOW IT WAS MADE	Compiled by machine learning from The Historic Faith's library of early-Christian writings and the Bible only. Every quotation was matched word for word against our stored text. Not yet reviewed by The Historic Faith.
SHARING WITH AN AI?	Every quotation here comes from The Historic Faith's library. If you paste this study into an AI, anything it adds beyond these pages comes from that AI, not from us.

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POINT 1 OF 6

Moses offered to be blotted out

Our note · compiled by machine learning · From the text: says what the passages say

Clement of Rome retells Moses on the mountain after the golden calf. Moses begs God to pardon the people, or else to remove his own name from the book of the living. Clement praises this as marvelous love, a servant willing to perish with his people.

1 “But Moses said, “Far be it from You, Lord: pardon the sin of this people; else blot me also out of the book of the living.””

later in the same passage

“The servant speaks freely to his Lord, and asks for forgiveness for the people, or begs that he himself might perish along with them.”

EARLY CHRISTIAN WRITER **Clement of Rome,** *First Epistle to the Corinthians* **Source 18, page 6** Read it in the library ›
THF's updated English

POINT 2 OF 6

Clement of Alexandria saw selfless perfection

Our note · compiled by machine learning · From the text: says what the passages say

Clement of Alexandria quotes the same prayer. He says Moses was not thinking of himself but of the salvation of all, and that he chose to die with the people rather than be saved alone.

2 “But he answered, not thinking about himself, but about the salvation of all: "By no means, O Lord. Forgive this people their sin, or blot me out of the book of the living."”

later in the same passage

“How great his perfection was, since he wished to die together with the people rather than be saved alone!”

EARLY CHRISTIAN WRITER **Clement of Alexandria,** *Stromata* 4.19 (c. 190–215 AD) **Source 6, page 5** Read it in the library ›
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POINT 3 OF 6

God blots out those who sin

Our note · compiled by machine learning · From the text: says what the passages say

Cyprian points out that Moses' request was not granted. God answered that the one who sins against Him is the one He removes from His book. Cyprian uses this to show that even a great saint's prayer does not simply cancel sin against God.

3

“In Exodus, Moses prays for the people, and his prayer is not granted.”

later in the same passage

“Whoever has sinned against Me, him I will blot out of My book.””

EARLY CHRISTIAN WRITER **Cyprian,** *Treatises* (c. 248–258 AD)
THF's updated English

Source 13, page 6 Read it in the library ›

POINT 4 OF 6

Being written with the righteous

Our note · compiled by machine learning · From the text: says what the passages say

Hippolytus reads Psalm 69 as spoken about those who persecuted Christ. He explains being written with the righteous as being counted with the holy fathers and patriarchs, so the book stands for belonging among God's faithful people.

4

“But let them be blotted out of the book of the living, and not be written with the righteous, that is, with their holy fathers and patriarchs.”

EARLY CHRISTIAN WRITER **Hippolytus,** *Against the Jews* 1 (c. 200–236 AD)
THF's updated English

Source 8, page 5 Read it in the library ›

POINT 5 OF 6

Names in the book rise to life

Our note · compiled by machine learning · From the text: says what the passages say

In another fragment Hippolytus speaks of the book of life. Those whose names are written there are the ones who believed and rise to everlasting life, while others rise to shame and punishment.

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5 “These will rise to everlasting life. That is, those who have believed in the true life and whose names are written in the book of life.”

later in the same passage

“And these will rise to shame. That is, those who are joined to Antichrist and are thrown with him into everlasting punishment.”

EARLY CHRISTIAN WRITER **Hippolytus,** *Exegetical Fragments* 1 (c. 200–236 AD) **Source 9, page 5** Read it in the library ›
THF's updated English

POINT 6 OF 6

The living are God's saints

Our note · compiled by machine learning · Interpretation: our reading of the passages, not their words

Origen does not speak of the book here, but he explains who "the living" are. Since God is the God of the living and the God of the saints, he concludes that the living are the saints. This helps show why the book belongs to God's holy people.

6 “If, then, He is the God of the saints, and is called the God of the living, then the saints are the living, and the living are saints.”

EARLY CHRISTIAN WRITER **Origen,** *Commentary on John* 2 (c. 215–254 AD) **Source 11, page 6** Read it in the library ›
THF's updated English

THE LIMITS

What these passages don’t tell us

- These passages do not count every place the phrase appears in Scripture.
- They do not explain exactly how the book of the living and the book of life differ, if they differ at all.
- A word-for-word match shows that a quotation really is in our text. It does not show that our reading of it is right, or who wrote each work.

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WHERE EVERY QUOTE CAME FROM

The Sources

The 18 early Christian passages and 210 Bible verses we kept for this question (repeats and weak or off-topic search hits were left out): early Christian passages first (sources 1–18, grouped by writer, earliest first), then Bible verses in The Faith Once Delivered Bible (sources 19–104, in Bible order), then 124 more verses THF links to these passages, by reference. **Quote 1, page 2** beside a source shows where the study quotes it. Passages are in THF's updated English unless marked "1885 English" (the Roberts–Donaldson translation, public domain). "… [continues online]" marks a passage the library gave only in part. **On paper?** At **thehistoricfaith.com**, Bible verses are in the **Audio Bible** and early Christian writings in the **Library** (search for the title).

EARLY CHRISTIAN WRITERS *18 passages from 9 writers*

Hermas, *c. 90–150 AD · sources 1–2*

1 *Shepherd* (1885 English; on point 5) "who does these things shall not be deserted by God, but shall be enrolled in the books of the living… [continues online] **read ›**

2 *Shepherd* (on point 5) will be enrolled in the Books of Life with the saints… [continues online] **read ›**

Irenaeus, *c. 175–202 AD · sources 3–5*

3 *Against Heresies: Book V* (on point 5) "the books were opened. Moreover," he says, "the book of life was opened, and the dead were judged… [continues online] **read ›**

4 *Against Heresies: Book V* (1885 English; on point 5) "all who dwell upon the earth worshipped him, [every one] whose name was not written in the book of the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world… [continues online] **read ›**

5 *Against Heresies: Book IV* (on point 6) Our Lord Himself is the resurrection, as He declares, "I am the resurrection and the life." The fathers are His children, for the prophet says, "Instead of your fathers, your… [continues online] **read ›**

Clement of Alexandria, *c. 190–215 AD · sources 6–7*

6 *Stromata* 4.19 **Quote 2, page 2** "this people their sin, or blot me out of the book of the living… [continues online] **read ›**

7 *Instructor* 1.7 (on point 3) "one who teaches Moses to act as a teacher. For the Lord says, "If anyone sins before Me, I will blot him out of My book. But now, go and… [continues online] **read ›**

Hippolytus, *c. 200–236 AD · sources 8–9*

8 *Against the Jews* 1 **Quote 4, page 3** "let them be blotted out of the book of the living, and not be written with the righteous, that is, with their holy fathers and patriarchs… [continues online] **read ›**

9 *Exegetical Fragments* 1 (1885 English) **Quote 5, page 4** "These shall awake to everlasting life. That is, those who have believed in the true life, and who have their names written in the book of life… [continues online] **read ›**

Origen, *c. 215–254 AD · sources 10–11*

10 *Commentary on John* 5 "these excuses. We began with the words of the Preacher, where he says, "My son, beware of making many books." With this I compare a saying from the Proverbs of… [continues online] **read ›**

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11 *Commentary on John* 2 **Quote 6, page 4** the living. Nor, when anyone is called living, is the further meaning absent that, besides having life, he is also holy. Very close to this is the lesson drawn from… [continues online] **read ›**

Cyprian, *c. 248–258 AD · sources 12–13*

12 *Treatises* (on point 3) “made for themselves gods of gold. Yet now, if You will forgive their sin, forgive it; but if not, blot me out of the book that You have written." And… [continues online] **read ›**

13 *Treatises* **Quote 3, page 3** “have made for themselves gods of gold. And now, if You forgive their sin, forgive it; but if not, blot me out of the book You have written.” And the… [continues online] **read ›**

Apostolic Constitutions, *c. 250–380 AD · sources 14–16*

14 *Apostolic Constitutions* (on point 6) “all live to Him." Exodus 3:6; Luke… [continues online] **read ›**

15 *Apostolic Constitutions* (on point 5) “all men shall be written in Your book… [continues online] **read ›**

16 *Apostolic Constitutions* (on point 5) practice and wicked thought. Forgive them all their offenses, both voluntary and involuntary, and blot out that handwriting which is against them, Colossians 2:13-14, and write them in… [continues online] **read ›**

Anonymous · *source 17*

17 *Treatise Against the Heretic Novatian* 1 (on point 5) “another book was opened, which is the book of life. And every one was judged according to those things that were written in the book, according to their own works… [continues online] **read ›**

Clement of Rome · *source 18*

18 *First Epistle to the Corinthians* **Quote 1, page 2** “blot me also out of the book of… [continues online] **read ›**

THE BIBLE *86 verses, The Faith Once Delivered Bible (Old Testament from the Septuagint), in Bible order*

19 **Genesis 2:4** This is the book of the generation of heaven and earth, when they came to be, in the day that the Lord God made the heaven and the earth, **read ›**

20 **Genesis 3:20** Adam called the name of his wife Life, because she was the mother of all the living. **read ›**

21 **Genesis 6:7** And God said, “I will blot out from the face of the earth man whom I have made, from man to cattle, and from creeping things to the birds of heaven; for I have taken to heart that I made them.” **read ›**

22 **Genesis 7:23** So God blotted out every living thing that was on the face of the earth, from man to cattle, and creeping things, and the birds of heaven; they were blotted out from the earth. Only Noah was left, and those with him in the ark. **read ›**

23 **Exodus 17:14** Then the Lord said to Moses, “Write this for a remembrance in a book, and say it in the hearing of Jesus; for I will utterly blot out the remembrance of Amalek from under heaven.” **read ›**

24 **Exodus 32:32** And now, if you will forgive them their sin, forgive it; but if not, blot me out of your book that you have written.” **read ›**

25 **Exodus 32:33** The Lord said to Moses, “If anyone has sinned before me, I will blot them out of my book. **read ›**

26 **Numbers 5:23** Then the priest shall write these curses in a book, and wash them off into the water of proof that brings the curse. **read ›**

27 **Numbers 14:21** But as I live, and as my name lives, the glory of the Lord shall fill all the earth. **read ›**

28 **Deuteronomy 4:4** But you who held fast to the Lord your God are all alive today. **read ›**

29 **Deuteronomy 9:14** And now let me destroy them utterly, and I will blot out their name from under heaven, and I will make you into a nation great and strong and much more numerous than this.” **read ›**

30 **Deuteronomy 29:20** God shall by no means be willing to be merciful to him; but then the anger of the Lord and his jealousy shall blaze against that man, and all the curses of this covenant that are written in this book shall cling to him, and the Lord shall blot out his name from under heaven. **read ›**

31 **Deuteronomy 30:19** I call heaven and earth to witness against you today: I have set before you life and death, the blessing and the curse. Choose life, that you may live, you and your seed, **read ›**

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32 **Deuteronomy 30:20** to love the Lord your God, to obey his voice, and to hold fast to him; for this is your life and the length of your days, to dwell on the land that the Lord swore to your fathers, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, to give them. **read ›**

33 **Deuteronomy 32:47** For this is not an empty word for you; for it is your life, and by this word you shall live long on the land into which you are crossing the Jordan, to inherit it there. **read ›**

34 **1 Kings 11:41** And the rest of the acts of Solomon, and all that he did, and all his understanding, behold, are they not written in the book of the words of Solomon? **read ›**

35 **1 Chronicles 9:1** So all Israel was enrolled; and these are written in the book of the kings of Israel and Judah, with those who were carried away to Babylon for their lawlessness, **read ›**

36 **2 Chronicles 28:26** The rest of his acts and his deeds, first and last, behold, they are written in the book of the kings of Judah and Israel. **read ›**

37 **2 Chronicles 35:27** and his acts, first and last, behold, they are written in the book of the kings of Israel and Judah. **read ›**

38 **Nehemiah 6:2** Sanballat and Geshem sent to me, saying, “Come, let us meet together in the villages in the plain of Ono.” But they were planning to do me harm. (Septuagint 2 Esdras 16:2 (Nehemiah 6:2 in most Bibles)) **read ›**

39 **Psalms 51:9** Turn your face away from my sins, and blot out all my iniquities. (Septuagint Psalm 50:11 (Psalm 51:9 in most Bibles)) **read ›**

40 **Psalms 69:28** Let them be blotted out of the book of the living, and let them not be written with the righteous. (Septuagint Psalm 68:29 (Psalm 69:28 in most Bibles)) **read ›**

41 **Ecclesiastes 7:23** All these things I tested by wisdom. I said, “I will become wise”; but it was far from me. **read ›**

42 **Ecclesiastes 9:4** For who is he who shares with all the living? There is hope, for a living dog is better than a dead lion. **read ›**

43 **Ecclesiastes 9:5** For the living will know that they will die, but the dead know nothing; and they have no more reward, for their memory is forgotten. **read ›**

44 **Song of Solomon 4:14** nard and saffron, calamus and cinnamon, with all the trees of Lebanon, myrrh, aloes, with all the finest ointments; **read ›**

45 **Song of Solomon 4:15** a fountain of the garden, and a well of living water, rushing down from Lebanon. **read ›**

46 **Isaiah 7:19** and they shall all come into the valleys of the land, and into the holes of the rocks, and into the caves, and into every crevice. **read ›**

47 **Isaiah 38:16** O Lord, for word was brought to you concerning it; and you raised up my breath, and being comforted I lived. **read ›**

48 **Jeremiah 9:6** Interest upon interest and deceit upon deceit; they would not know me, says the Lord. (Septuagint Jeremiah 9:5 (Jeremiah 9:6 in most Bibles)) **read ›**

49 **Jeremiah 50:3** For a nation has come up against her from the north; it will make her land a desolation, and there will be no one dwelling in it, from man to beast. (Septuagint Jeremiah 27:3 (Jeremiah 50:3 in most Bibles)) **read ›**

50 **Jeremiah 50:11** Because you rejoiced and boasted as you plundered my inheritance, because you leaped about like calves in the grass and butted like bulls, (Septuagint Jeremiah 27:11 (Jeremiah 50:11 in most Bibles)) **read ›**

51 **Ezekiel 12:10** Say to them: Thus says the Lord God: The ruler and the leader in Jerusalem, and to all the house of Israel who are in their midst, **read ›**

52 **Ezekiel 18:17** and has turned back his hand from unrighteousness, has taken neither interest nor increase, has done righteousness, and walked in my statutes—he shall not die for the unrighteous deeds of his father; he shall surely live. **read ›**

53 **Hosea 4:15** But you, Israel, do not be ignorant; and Judah, do not go into Gilgal, and do not go up to the house of On, and do not swear by the living Lord. **read ›**

54 **Hosea 9:4** They have not poured out wine to the Lord, and their sacrifices have not been pleasing to him; they are to them like the bread of mourning; all who eat them shall be defiled, because their bread, the bread for their own souls, shall not enter the house of the Lord. **read ›**

55 **Hosea 9:5** What will you do in the days of the festival assembly, and on the day of the feast of the Lord? **read ›**

56 **Malachi 3:16** Those who feared the Lord said these things, each to his neighbor; and the Lord paid attention and heard, and wrote a book of memorial before him for those who fear the Lord and revere his name. **read ›**

57 **Tobit 3:13** Command that I be released from the earth, and that I no longer hear taunts. **read ›**

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58 **Wisdom of Sirach 37:25** The life of a man is in a number of days, but the days of Israel are without number. **read ›**

59 **Wisdom of Sirach 40:12** Every bribe and unrighteousness will be blotted out, but faithfulness will stand forever. **read ›**

60 **Baruch 1:14** And you shall read this book that we have sent to you, to make confession in the house of the Lord on the day of a feast and on the days of the appointed season. **read ›**

61 **Baruch 3:11** that you are counted with those in Hades? **read ›**

62 **Baruch 4:1** This is the book of the statutes of God and the law that endures forever. All who hold fast to her will come to life, but those who forsake her will die. **read ›**

63 **1 Maccabees 3:48** And they spread out the book of the law, concerning the things about which the nations sought guidance from the images of their idols. **read ›**

64 **3 Maccabees 2:19** Open the verse to read it. **read ›**

65 **3 Maccabees 2:29** Open the verse to read it. **read ›**

66 **3 Maccabees 2:32** Open the verse to read it. **read ›**

67 **3 Maccabees 4:14** Open the verse to read it. **read ›**

68 **3 Maccabees 4:15** Open the verse to read it. **read ›**

69 **3 Maccabees 4:17** Open the verse to read it. **read ›**

70 **4 Maccabees 7:19** Open the verse to read it. **read ›**

71 **4 Maccabees 17:18** Open the verse to read it. **read ›**

72 **4 Maccabees 18:19** Open the verse to read it. **read ›**

73 **1 Enoch 14:1** Open the verse to read it. **read ›**

74 **1 Enoch 37:5** Open the verse to read it. **read ›**

75 **1 Enoch 40:2** Open the verse to read it. **read ›**

76 **1 Enoch 47:3** Open the verse to read it. **read ›**

77 **1 Enoch 62:16** Open the verse to read it. **read ›**

78 **1 Enoch 72:1** Open the verse to read it. **read ›**

79 **1 Enoch 89:69** Open the verse to read it. **read ›**

80 **1 Enoch 89:71** Open the verse to read it. **read ›**

81 **1 Enoch 90:19** Open the verse to read it. **read ›**

82 **1 Enoch 92:1** Open the verse to read it. **read ›**

83 **1 Enoch 98:15** Open the verse to read it. **read ›**

84 **1 Enoch 103:4** Open the verse to read it. **read ›**

85 **1 Enoch 108:2** Open the verse to read it. **read ›**

86 **Matthew 1:2** Abraham became the father of Isaac. Isaac became the father of Jacob. Jacob became the father of Judah and his brothers. **read ›**

87 **Mark 12:26** But concerning the dead being raised, have you not read in the book of Moses, in the passage about the bush, how God spoke to him, saying, ‘I am the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob’? **read ›**

88 **Mark 12:27** He is not the God of the dead, but of the living. You are therefore badly mistaken.” **read ›**

89 **Luke 20:38** Now he is not the God of the dead, but of the living, for all are alive to him.” **read ›**

90 **John 3:16** For God so loved the world, that he gave his only-begotten Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish, but have eternal life. **read ›**

91 **Romans 14:9** For to this end Christ died, rose, and lived again, that he might be Lord of both the dead and the living. **read ›**

92 **1 Corinthians 1:14** I thank God that I baptized none of you except Crispus and Gaius, **read ›**

93 **1 Corinthians 3:11** For no one can lay another foundation besides the one laid, which is Jesus Christ. **read ›**

94 **1 Corinthians 4:1** Let a man regard us in this way, as servants of Christ and stewards of God’s mysteries. **read ›**

95 **1 Peter 4:5** They will give account to him who is ready to judge the living and the dead. **read ›**

96 **Revelation 1:18** and the living one. I was dead, and behold, I am alive forever and ever. Amen. I have the keys of death and Hades. **read ›**

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97 **Revelation 3:5** He who overcomes will be arrayed in white garments, and I will in no way blot his name out of the book of life, and I will confess his name before my Father, and before his angels. **read ›**

98 **Revelation 5:1** I saw, in the right hand of him who sat on the throne, a book written inside and outside, sealed shut with seven seals. **read ›**

99 **Revelation 13:8** All who dwell on the earth will worship him, everyone whose name has not been written from the foundation of the world in the book of life of the Lamb who has been killed. **read ›**

100 **Revelation 20:5** The rest of the dead did not live until the thousand years were finished. This is the first resurrection. **read ›**

101 **Revelation 20:12** I saw the dead, great and small, standing before the throne, and books were opened. Another book was opened, which is the book of life, and the dead were judged according to their works from what was written in the books. **read ›**

102 **Revelation 20:15** If anyone was not found written in the book of life, he was cast into the lake of fire. **read ›**

103 **Revelation 21:27** There will in no way enter into it anything profane, or one who causes an abomination or a lie, but only those who are written in the Lamb's book of life. **read ›**

104 **Revelation 22:19** and if anyone takes away from the words of the book of this prophecy, may God take away his share in the tree of life and the holy city, which are written about in this book. **read ›**

ALSO LINKED BY THF TO THESE PASSAGES *124 verses, by reference*

Partly machine-linked: related to the passages, not always quoted in them. Each reference links to the verse in our audio Bible.

Exodus 32:11

Psalms 2:7 · 29:4 · 33:6

Proverbs 10:19

Ecclesiastes 12:12

Isaiah 42:1

Ezekiel 2:10

Matthew 5:12 · 5:16 · 5:34 · 5:35 · 9:2 · 10:15 · 10:42 · 11:9 · 13:17 · 14:17 · 17:24 · 19:11 · 21:13 · 22:7 · 22:37 · 25:34 · 25:41 · 26:35 · 28:19

Mark 10:38

Luke 1:6 · 1:17 · 1:46 · 1:67 · 1:76 · 2:8 · 2:22 · 2:23 · 2:28 · 2:29 · 5:31 · 7:26 · 12:42 · 13:6 · 14:27 · 15:4 · 15:7 · 16:31 · 18:10 · 18:27

John 1:3 · 2:3 · 2:18 · 4:41 · 4:42 · 5:39 · 5:46 · 7:30 · 8:36 · 9:1 · 11:25 · 13:2 · 13:17 · 15:5 · 20:31

Acts 1:3 · 1:9 · 3:12 · 4:8 · 4:22 · 4:24 · 4:33 · 7:56 · 8:9 · 8:27 · 14:15 · 15:14 · 16:16 · 17:24 · 20:7

Romans 1:1 · 1:18 · 2:16 · 8:36 · 16:20

1 Corinthians 7:31 · 8:4 · 12:28

Galatians 4:26

Ephesians 1:21 · 4:8 · 4:9 · 4:16 · 5:6 · 5:13 · 5:32

Philippians 2:15 · 4:3

Colossians 1:14 · 2:13

2 Thessalonians 1:9 · 2:10 · 2:11 · 3:6

1 Timothy 4:16 · 6:4

2 Timothy 4:10 · 4:18

Hebrews 11:16

1 Peter 2:23 · 4:14

1 John 2:18

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Revelation 1:6 · 1:12 · 1:17 · 6:12 · 11:19 · 13:2 · 13:11 · 13:14 · 19:20 · 20:11 · 21:1 · 21:2 · 21:5 · 22:20

Searched: Ante-Nicene Fathers volumes 1–9 and the Bible, including the Septuagint.

ABOUT THIS STUDY

A THF member asked “What did early Christians mean by the "book of the living"?” on April 19, 2026. The Historic Faith answered it as a public study on November 9, 2026.

Library only. This study was written only from The Historic Faith’s library of early-Christian writings and the Bible, never from the web. Every passage we kept from what the library gave is listed above, with a link to read it.

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THE END OF THIS STUDY