

Do unborn babies, infants, children before the age of accountability and those who are born with diminished mental capacity, go to heaven when they die? What does God's Word say about this?

People often wonder about the eternal destiny of the unborn, babies, little children and those unable to intellectually understand the gospel. Unfortunately, the Bible offers us no direct answer. However, based on several passages in the Scriptures, and of course on God's character, we can come to a coherent and logical understanding of how God treats those who are not cognizant nor conscious of sin.

2Samuel 12:23 is often quoted to imply that babies go to heaven; for David is speaking of the son conceived in Bathsheba, but who died because of David's sins, "But now he has died; why should I fast? Can I bring him back again? I will go to him, but he will not return to me." Though the verse doesn't explicitly say that, David clearly expects to one day be reunited with his dead son. Since we know David belongs to God, and therefore has the hope of heaven, we can infer that his hope of reuniting with his son means that he expects his son to be in heaven. This suggests strong evidence concerning the destiny of the unborn and children who die young.

If this were all we had to support our position, it would be difficult to make any profound determinations. However, there are other references that validate this conclusion. First, the Bible clearly teaches that God cares deeply for children.

Matthew 18:3-4, "Truly I say to you, unless you are converted and become like children, you will not enter the kingdom of heaven. Whoever then humbles himself as this child, he is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven." **Matthew 19:13-15**, "Then some children were brought to Him so that He might lay His hands on them and pray; and the disciples rebuked them. But Jesus said, 'Let the children alone, and do not hinder them from coming to Me; for the kingdom of heaven belongs to such as these.'" **Luke 18:17**, "Truly I say to you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God like a child will not enter it at all."

Although those verses don't explicitly state that children who die do go to heaven, those verses do show God's care and great love toward children.

The psalmist reminds us that God is "full of compassion and gracious, long suffering and abundant in mercy and truth" (**Psalms 86:15**). He is the God who put on flesh pay for our sins by His death on the cross (cf. **2Corinthians 5:21**). He is the God of all comfort concerning those who love Him, "He will wipe away every tear from their eyes; there will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain" (**Revelation 21:4**).

We can be assured that God will do what is right and loving because He is the ultimate and divine standard of rightness and love. These considerations have to give evidence of God's love to the unborn, those who die before knowledge of sin, those who are incapable of any cognitive awareness of sin.

Also, while unborn babies, infants, children before the age of accountability and those who are born with diminished mental capacity have neither sensed their personal sin or their need for salvation, and they have not placed their faith in Christ; we must come to terms with the fact that Scripture clearly teaches that condemnation is based on a knowing rejection of God's revelation; whether that be God's general revelation (His Creation) or His specific revelation (His Spoken/ Written Word). Scripture doesn't teach a condemnation of those who are ignorant of God's revelation.

Romans 1:18-20, "For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men who suppress the truth in unrighteousness, because that which is known about God is evident within them; for God made it evident to them. For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes, His eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly seen, being understood through what has been made, so that they are without excuse."

Can we definitely say that unborn babies, infants, children before the age of accountability and those who are born with diminished mental capacity have knowingly suppressed the truth of God, that they have known of God's eternal power and divine nature, and have clearly seen and understood this, so that they are without excuse? I don't think so!

John 12:48, "He who rejects Me and does not receive My sayings, has one who judges him; the word I spoke is what will judge him at the last day."

Romans 10:13-14, "Whoever will call on the name of the Lord will be saved. How then will they call on Him in whom they have not believed? How will they believe in Him whom they have not heard? **17**, "faith comes from hearing, and hearing by the word of Christ."

Yes, everyone is born with original sin, i.e., we have the propensity to sin as well as the inherent guilt of original sin. But if unborn babies, infants, children before the age of accountability and those who are born with diminished mental capacity die apart from having made a conscious willful rejection of Jesus Christ, or to have displayed willful sin without knowing what sin is, will they be sent to an eternal condemnation in hell? I strongly think not!

Our God is a God of love, and yes, also justice; but what kind of justice condemns those who are not capable of even knowing that they have done wrong; for they do not even have a conscience, and so are unaware of their offense. God's love covers a multitude of sins, but more than that, God's love is merciful, kind, and gracious and therefore, unborn babies, infants, children before the age of accountability and those who are born with diminished mental capacity are not held responsible by God because they do not understand the concept of right and wrong, good and evil, they are under God's grace, just as Adam and Eve were before they understood what it meant to disobey the Lord.

The relationship Adam and Eve had with God before they knowingly sinned (**Genesis 2:25**), "And the man and his wife were both naked and were not ashamed," was much different than the relationship they had with Him afterward (**Genesis 3:6-7**), "When the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was desirable to make one wise, she took from its fruit and ate; and she gave also to her husband with her, and he ate. Then the eyes of both of them were opened, and they knew that they were naked; and they sewed fig leaves together and made themselves loin coverings."

God does not condemn innocents to hell. There is no such teaching in the Scriptures. Condemnation comes on those who reject God's plan through Christ; unborn babies, infants, children before the age of accountability and those who are born with diminished mental capacity to understand sin and salvation will not be judged to an eternity in hell. **Hebrews 9:27** says it is given to men to die once and then comes the judgement, but if one has never been conscious of sin, if one never had a chance to knowingly think an evil thought or do an evil act, there would be nothing to judge.

If Adam and Eve would have died before they sinned, they would have gone to heaven. It wasn't until after they sinned in **Genesis 3:22-23**, the LORD God said, "'Behold, the man has become like one of Us, knowing good and evil; and now, he might stretch out his hand, and take also from the tree of life, and eat, and live forever'— therefore the Lord God sent him out from the garden of Eden, to cultivate the ground from which he was taken."

God sent Adam and Eve out of the Garden to protect them from an eternal state of condemnation, for they were now guilty of sin and if they were to eat from the tree of life, they would forever have to live cursed by God for their sin.

They were innocent until they willfully disobeyed God. The question that must be answered in all this, is the following: Can unborn babies, infants, children before the age of accountability and those who are born with diminished mental capacity knowingly commit sin and therefore be judged by God to an eternal hell?

I say absolutely not!

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