

What Is the Destiny Of

Babies

Who Die?

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What Is the Destiny of Babies Who Die?

The Bible teaches that all men are sinners, deserving of the wrath of God. It also clearly teaches that salvation comes through faith in Jesus Christ. When discussing these truths, however, one question often comes up: “What is the eternal destiny of babies who die or the mentally retarded who are not able to comprehend the Gospel?” Do they go to heaven or hell? Is there any way we can know?

For the next several pages we will examine what the Bible says about the eternal destiny of babies and others who fit into this category of people who never reach a stage, mentally, where they can accept or reject the Gospel.

How to study this issue

Before we go any further in the discussion, I would like to say up front that the issue of infant salvation is a difficult one to examine. It is difficult for the simple reason that the Bible does not directly address the topic. Nowhere does the Bible tell us explicitly what happens to babies or the severely mentally retarded when they die. How do we approach this issue, then? First, we must approach this issue cautiously and humbly, understanding that the amount of information God has given us is limited. For whatever His reasons are, God has chosen not to reveal everything relating to this matter.

Second, as we address this issue, we must start with what we do know from Scripture. We must begin with a proper understanding of what the Bible says about such areas as sin, human nature, salvation, imputation, and judgment. When we have these basics

down, then we are in a position to try to draw some conclusions about what happens to infants when they die.

Does 2 Samuel 12 teach infant salvation?

I do not know of any passage in the Bible that clearly deals with the destiny of infants who die. There is one passage, however, that many people believe does address the issue—2 Samuel 12. This chapter describes the account of the baby who was born from the adulterous relationship between Bathsheba and David. As part of David's punishment, God told David that the child born from the adulterous union would die (12:14). As the chapter goes on to indicate, the child did die. David then made a statement in verses 22-23 that many believe has implications for the infant salvation debate:

And he [David] said, "While the child was still alive, I fasted and wept; for I said, 'Who knows, the Lord may be gracious to me, that the child may live.' But now he has died; why should I fast? Can I bring him back again? I shall go to him, but he will not return to me."

Some have taken David's statement to mean that David's baby went to heaven. According to them David was saying that the deceased baby went to heaven and that someday, he [David] would join the baby in glory. Is this interpretation accurate?

Though this view is possible, it does not seem that this interpretation fits the context of 2 Samuel 12 very well. In verse 22, David discussed the possibility of the child surviving physically; in verse 23 he stated that it was impossible for the child to be brought back to life. The context of David's statements seem to directly relate to physical life and death. When David says, "I shall go to him," David is declaring that the baby will not come back to physical life, but he [David] will someday join the baby in physical death. That is the simplest and most logical explanation. Besides, this view ties in with the fact that there is not much information given in the Old Testament concerning life after death. Most of what we know about the afterlife and heaven is found in the New Testament.

I do not believe, then, that 2 Samuel 12 can rightfully be used to show that babies go to heaven. Whatever conclusions we may draw on this issue, they must come from other Scripture passages.

All are sinners

Any study of salvation, including the issue of infants, must begin with a proper, biblical understanding of sin. Often, we try to deal with the issue of infant salvation by going around what the Scripture clearly says. The Bible clearly states that everyone conceived and born into the human race is a sinner. As Romans 5:12 states, “Therefore, just as through one man sin entered into the world, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men, because all sinned.” Because of our relationship to Adam, we as human beings are all sinners. Adam was the first man, and as such, he acted as the representative (or federal head) of the entire human race. Thus, when *he* acted—*we* acted. When Adam disobeyed God in the Garden of Eden, his sin was credited to every one of his descendants. We call this truth the imputation of Adam’s sin. As our representative, Adam’s sin was credited to every one of his descendants. This doctrine of the imputation of Adam’s sin is also seen in Romans 5:19: “For as through the one man’s disobedience the many were made sinners.”

There is another aspect to imputation other than Adam’s *sin* being imputed to us. It is also true that the *condemnation* for Adam’s sin has also been imputed to us as well. Romans 5:18 states, “So then as through one transgression there resulted condemnation to all men.” When Adam sinned in the Garden, his penalty was death. This death included not only physical death, but spiritual alienation from God now and eternal separation from God for eternity. That penalty that Adam received is also the penalty that is imputed to all of his descendants.

These truths concerning the imputation of Adam’s sin and resulting condemnation have ramifications for our discussion. When we understand that Adam’s sin and condemnation have been imputed to the entire human race, we understand that there is no such thing as an innocent person or baby. All stand condemned before God.

Sinners by nature

So far we have shown that all people have Adam’s sin and condemnation imputed to their account. But our guiltiness before God does not stop there. Not only does Scripture teach that all are sinners by imputation, it also teaches that all people have *inherited* a

sin nature from Adam as well.

A “nature” is a capacity to do something. When we talk about having a sin nature, we are saying that all people are born with a bent toward evil. At conception we were immediately corrupted and tainted by sin. This inherited corruption that we received from Adam is similar to a defective gene that has been passed on from a parent to a child. In the physical realm, a child has no say when he receives a defective gene from a parent—it just happens. The same is true in the spiritual realm with our sin nature. We know that from our ancestor, Adam, we have received a corrupted nature.

It is not our right to debate the fairness or unfairness of this truth. What we must do is face the reality of it. If, in the physical realm, my parents pass a defective gene on to me, it does me no good to argue about the fairness of it. That is just the way it is. The same is true in the spiritual realm. From Adam and Eve, our great, great, great grandparents, we received the defective corruption of sin and that makes us children of wrath. Various Scripture texts show this to be true.

Genesis 8:21 states, “And the LORD. . . said to Himself, ‘I will never again curse the ground on account of man, for the intent of man’s heart is evil from his youth.’” From this passage we see that the intent of man’s heart from his youngest days is evil.

In Psalm 51 David writes about his own sinful behavior. He had committed adultery with Bathsheba. He had also murdered Bathsheba’s husband, Uriah. Writing as a repentant man he declared, “Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity, and in sin my mother conceived me” (v. 5). Now, David is not claiming that the act of conception is sin. That would be contrary to Scripture. We know, for instance, that God told Adam and Eve to be fruitful and multiply and to fill the earth (Gen. 1:28). God would never command Adam and Eve to sin. On the contrary, what David is referring to is the sin nature that is inherent within himself at conception. David understood that he was a sinner even from the moment he was conceived. He sees his sinful actions flowing out of his very being as a sinful and corrupted person. As Psalm 58:3 states, “The wicked are estranged from the womb; these who speak lies go astray from birth.”

Jeremiah 17:9 also speaks to this issue. “The heart is more deceitful than all else and is desperately sick; who can understand it?”

The “heart” refers to the inner person. On the inside we are corrupted and defiled. We are diseased—desperately sick.

Sin nature and the image of God

What about the fact that we are made in the image of God? Can we be made in the image of God and still have an inherited sin nature? The answer is yes. All humans have the image of God within them but that image has become marred as a result of sin. A parallel can be made with a corrupted physical body. We may look at a person who seems healthy from the outside, but on the inside he is infected and permeated with a fatal disease. This person may have the image of a healthy body, but the disease inside of him is destroying him. The same principle applies to the image of God that we all carry. As human beings, we bear the image and likeness of God (emotion, intellect and will), but we are all corrupted by the disease of sin. We carry in us the image of God, but this image has been marred.

As we examine the Scriptural information, we cannot come to any other conclusion than that God sees all people—including infants—as fallen, sinful beings who are under the wrath of God. That is what the Bible tells us.

If we stopped at this point, we could conclude that if God decided to sentence all men to hell, including infants, we could only say that He was just and has done what is right. The Scripture, however, does not stop here. There are other issues to be examined—one of them being the judgments of Scripture.

The judgments of Scripture

The Bible tells of a number of future judgments in Scripture. There is the Bema Seat Judgment mentioned in 2 Corinthians 5:10, where the raptured church will stand before Jesus Christ in heaven. There is the Sheep-Goat Judgment of Matthew 25:31-46 where all Gentiles, who lived through the seven-year Tribulation period, will stand before Jesus Christ on earth. This is a judgment to determine who will enter the millennial kingdom after Christ’s second coming. There is also the Great White Throne Judgment, mentioned in Revelation 20:11-15, where all unbelievers of all ages stand before God to be sentenced to the lake of fire.

Why is this important to our current discussion of infant salvation? It is important because when one studies these judgments of Scripture, a pattern becomes evident—all the judgments of Scripture are based on a person's works—not on a person's nature.

Let us look at the final judgment—the Great White Throne Judgment of Revelation 20:11-15. According to the context of the Book of Revelation, the Great White Throne Judgment takes place after the one-thousand year reign of Christ upon the earth. At this judgment, every unbeliever of all time stands before God for sentencing to the lake of fire. Revelation 20:11-12a states:

And I saw a great white throne and Him who sat upon it, from whose presence earth and heaven fled away, and no place was found for them. And I saw the dead, the great and the small, standing before the throne, and books were opened; and another book was opened, which is the book of life.

Notice, at this judgment, that there is a set of books *and* another book. Revelation 20:12b states that, “the dead were judged from the things which were written in the books, according to their deeds.” The set of books has a listing of all the deeds of all people present at this judgment. Everything these people have ever done has been recorded. There is also another book present at this judgment—the book of life. Note that people are not judged from the book of life but from the deeds recorded in the other books.

Revelation 20:13 states, “And the sea gave up the dead which were in it, and death and Hades gave up the dead which were in them; and they were judged, every one of them according to their deeds.” Notice in this verse that each one, individually, without exception is judged. This is an awesome event. Every deed of every unbeliever will be taken into account by God. Again, keep in mind that this is a judgment based upon what men and women have done. Everyone at this judgment is being judged out of the books where their works were recorded. Only those whose names are written in the book of life escape the lake of fire.

The fact that this judgment and the other judgments of Scripture are based on works brings us to the issue of responsibility and accountability for actions. It does not seem that infants who have died have any basis on which to be judged, for they have not committed any deeds for which they could rightfully be held accountable. We

have already noted that all babies have a sin nature, but a baby could not have any works recorded in the books because he has not done anything. *The fact that judgment is based on deeds implies that the people at the judgment have made responsible decisions for which they are held accountable. This would seem to exclude infants who have died or any others incapable of making rational decisions.*

My view, then, is that those who died as infants are not at the Great White Throne Judgment. Only those who have committed deeds are at this judgment. I understand that my position is an argument from silence, but it does seem to fit the pattern of the judgments of Scripture. There is no indication in the Bible that people go to hell based on Adam's imputed sin or because of an inherited sin nature.

How do babies get to heaven?

If babies are not present at the Great White Throne Judgment where do they go? I believe that they go to heaven. *I base this opinion on the belief that the righteousness of Christ may be imputed to those who never reach an age where they can make responsible decisions.*

Romans 5:18-19 is foundational to this whole subject:

So then as through one transgression there resulted condemnation to all men, even so through one act of righteousness there resulted justification of life to all men. For as through the one man's disobedience the many were made sinners, even so through the obedience of the One the many will be made righteous.

This text teaches us about the imputation of Christ's righteousness. Just as Adam's sin and condemnation have been imputed to all men, Christ's righteousness is also imputed to certain people. Granted, we know that Christ's righteousness is primarily granted to all who believe, but it may also be possible that God has chosen to impute the righteousness of Christ and the life that comes with that righteousness to all those who never reached a point where they could believe the Gospel. His righteousness could be imputed to those who never reach a point where they can be held accountable for their actions.

What about justification by faith?

Now, what about justification by faith? The Bible says that salvation is by faith alone (see Romans 4). Are we now saying that there are two ways of salvation? No. We must remember that the Bible's emphasis on justification by faith is addressed to those who have the ability to respond to God's revelation. That was true in Romans 1 when Paul explained that God has revealed Himself to mankind through the creation. Man, however, has responded negatively to His creation and corrupted himself. Being justified by faith assumes a certain level of accountability and responsibility.

Believing the Gospel involves the ability to comprehend and make a responsible decision. In 1 Corinthians 15:1, for example, Paul stated, "Now I make known to you, brethren, the gospel which I preached to you, which also you received." We see in this verse that a responsible decision was made by the Corinthians. On the contrary, no one believes that an infant who died was capable of making responsible decisions. All babies have a sin nature and Adam's sin imputed to them, but they cannot make responsible decisions.

God's sovereignty

Ultimately, the salvation of anyone, including infants, resides in the sovereign purposes of God. As Paul states in Romans 9:10-13:

And not only this, but there was Rebekah also, when she had conceived twins by one man, our father Isaac; for though the twins were not yet born, and had not done anything good or bad, in order that God's purpose according to His choice might stand, not because of works, but because of Him who calls, it was said to her, "THE OLDER WILL SERVE THE YOUNGER." Just as it is written, "JACOB I LOVED, BUT ESAU I HATED."

We see in this text that God sovereignly chose Jacob but not Esau. This choice was made before either child was born. The main point is that God has the sovereign right to bestow salvation on whom-ever He pleases. In verse 14, Paul states, "What shall we say then? There is no injustice with God, is there? May it never be!" God's sovereignty in election does not mean that He is unfair. Such a thought is abhorrent. Verse 18 states, "So then He has mercy on whom He desires, and He hardens whom He desires." God is sovereign in salvation. All He has to do is act in a way that is consistent

with His righteous character. He has made salvation possible through the death of His Son, Jesus Christ. He now can apply that salvation to whomever He pleases.

Every tribe, tongue, people and nation

The view that infants who die have the righteousness of Christ imputed to them, helps explain the presence of people from every single tribe in heaven. Revelation 5:9 states, "And they sang a new song, saying, "Worthy art Thou to take the book, and to break its seals; for Thou wast slain, and didst purchase for God with Thy blood men from every tribe and tongue and people and nation." Revelation 7:9-10 makes a similar claim,

After these things I looked, and behold, a great multitude, which no one could count, from every nation and all tribes and peoples and tongues, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed in white robes, and palm branches were in their hands; and they cry out with a loud voice, saying, "Salvation to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb."

We know that there have been tribes and groups of people that have never heard the Gospel. In eternity how can there be representatives from every people group when some groups have never heard the Gospel? The answer may be that God has chosen to save those who died as infants from these groups who never heard the Gospel. In His mercy, God may use the deaths of infants as part of His plan to save some from every people group.

Election and infants

The Scripture is clear that God has chosen some out of the sinful pool of humanity to be saved. His choosing of some to salvation is called "election." How does infant salvation tie into the issue of election? I believe that all babies who die are elect. I do not believe, as some do, that some babies who die are elect and go to heaven while others go to hell. I believe Christ's righteousness is credited to all those who never reached the point where they could make rational decisions.

Age of accountability

What is the age where children become responsible for believing

the Gospel? Simply put—the Bible does not say. The reason it does not say may be because the age of accountability or understanding for each child may be different. Some children comprehend certain truths earlier than others.

Not knowing a certain set age when children become accountable can be a good thing. Not knowing at what age our children may become accountable to God for their actions may serve as a motivation for us as parents not to wait when it comes to sharing Christ with them. If God said the age of accountability was four, we'd probably be lax in our responsibility to share Christ with them until they were three years old. If God said the age of accountability was 14, we'd probably wait until they were 13 before we'd share the Gospel with them. But as it is, there is an urgency to sharing Christ with our kids. Personally, I started sharing the Gospel with our children when they were in the crib. I believe we can never start too early to share the Gospel, and it is good for us to be in the habit of speaking to our children about eternal issues.

Conclusion

We must be careful when speculating on an issue such as infant salvation. I cannot dogmatically claim that my view is absolutely certain. I do believe, though, that the view I have presented is consistent with what the Bible teaches about salvation, accountability, and God's character.

Infant salvation, in some ways, is an issue that is out of our hands. We may have a tendency to worry about it, but we should not. God is in control and He does what is right. When God was about to destroy all of Sodom and Gomorrah, Abraham declared, "Shall not the Judge of all the earth deal justly?" (Gen. 18:25). God is righteous, fair and just. We can know that He always does the right thing. And whatever God does with infants or the mentally handicapped who die, we know that He will be just.

We should heed the words of Deuteronomy 29:29: "The secret things belong to the Lord our God, but the things revealed belong to us and to our sons forever, that we may observe all the words of this law." There is an important principle in this verse. We can know what God has revealed to us, but there are certain things that only God fully understands. In those areas He has not revealed, we are called on to trust Him. The fact that I do not have a clear resolution

to the problem of infant salvation does not trouble me because I know that God knows the solution. In this area, God has simply chosen not to reveal everything to us. Perhaps He has chosen not to reveal certain information about this matter because it would overwhelm our finite minds. Besides, whatever God does, there is nothing we can do about it.

What happens to infants and the severely mentally retarded is an important issue, but it should not sidetrack us from other issues. It amazes me how some people get upset over the eternal destiny of those who have never heard the Gospel, but they themselves fail to consider their own eternal destiny and relationship to Jesus Christ. How God handles the issue of babies who die we cannot know this side of eternity. But we can know *our* destiny. I pray that all reading this booklet have done what God's Word requires of them, namely trusting in Jesus Christ for their salvation.

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