

What Is The Age Of Accountability?

by Gary T. Panell

Some people think that God sent babies and young children to hell when He destroyed the world with the flood. This couldn't be further from the truth. God did not send the children to hell who perished in the flood. Yes, they died, but their spirit went to be with God. This is also the case for all babies and young children throughout history.

We see God's compassion for babies and young children in the book of Jonah in the Bible. In Jonah 3:11 it says, "And should I not pity Nineveh, that great city, in which are more than one hundred and twenty thousand persons who cannot discern between their right hand and their left...?" In Deuteronomy, speaking of children entering the Promised Land, God said, "Moreover your little ones and your children, who you say will be victims, **who today have no knowledge of good and evil**, they shall go in there; to them I will give it, and they shall possess it" (Deuteronomy 1:39).

Another passage in the Bible, that makes it abundantly clear that babies and young children go to heaven when they die, is found in 2 Samuel 12. Here is the story of the sin of King David with Bathsheba. David was told by God that he would be judged for his sin, even though he had repented of it--David had given great occasion to the enemies of the LORD to blaspheme Him. The Bible says the baby was struck with sickness and died. We see this part of the story in 2 Samuel 12:13-23. David noticed that the servants were whispering, and understood that the baby had died. The servants thought that David would be very sad and go into mourning and more fasting; David, however, surprised them. Look at 2 Samuel 12: 20, which says, "So David arose from the ground, washed and anointed himself, and changed his clothes; and he went into the house of the LORD and worshiped. Then he went to his own house; and when he requested, they set food before him, and he ate."

David's answer to his servants at this point is the basis for the doctrine that babies and young children go to heaven when they die. We believe David was a man of God. He was not perfect but he spoke under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit when he gives this answer, 2 Samuel 12: 21-23. "Then his servants said to him, 'What is this that you have done? You fasted and wept for the child while he was alive, but when the child died, you arose and ate food.' And he said, 'While

the child was alive, I fasted and wept; for I said, "Who can tell whether the LORD will be gracious to me, that the child may live?" But now he is dead; why should I fast? Can I bring him back again? I shall go to him, but he shall not return to me." This shows that David believed with all his heart that babies and young children go to heaven when they die.

Then there are other verses that make it extremely clear that there is a time before which babies and young children are not held accountable for their actions. "Therefore the Lord Himself will give you a sign: Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a Son, and shall call His name Immanuel. Curds and honey He shall eat, that He may know to refuse the evil and choose the good. For before the Child shall know to refuse the evil and choose the good, the land that you dread will be forsaken by both her kings." (Isaiah 7:14-16)

Our purpose here is not to get into a discussion on this very important passage about the Messiah being born of the Virgin Mary and the dual prophecy, which we have covered in a discussion question. Here, however, we want to explain that the passage is also showing that there is a time or age before which babies and young children are not held accountable for their action. These are forgiven for the sin nature that has been passed on to them through their parents, which we see in Psalm 51:5. God in His mercy and grace forgives the inherited sin of babies and young children, and takes them to heaven when they die at this tender age.

Let's look at this passage from the perspective of those before the age of accountability. First, verse 15: "Curds and honey He shall eat, **that He may know to refuse the evil and choose the good.**" This was a diet given to babies and young children so they could grow healthy. They have not yet come to that place where they understand right and wrong. As if this is not enough the passage goes on to repeat this thought in verse 16a: "**For before the Child shall know to refuse the evil and choose the good...**" showing us beyond a shadow of a doubt that there is an age where children are held accountable for their actions. Before this age they do not understand, as far as God is concerned, the seriousness of their actions.

That brings us to the question: What age is the age of accountability? In other words, what age are people held accountable for their own actions and sent to hell to pay for their sins, if they have not received Christ? There is a time in each person's life where we are held accountable before God for our sins. I believe this is different with each individual, and only God knows what age this is. Some

people think this age is the age of twelve. The reason they believe this is because Jesus went to the temple when he was twelve years old. However, this is not a good argument, because Jesus went to the synagogue every Sabbath probably since the time He was born.

Only God knows what the age of accountability is, and it is different with each individual. I believe this is because there are people who are severely mentally retarded who will never come to the age of accountability. They are like young children all their lives and in no way could have the opportunity to understand how to receive Christ as their personal Lord and Savior. In, Romans 1:20-21, it is clear that people have to know something about God, or understand something about Him in order to believe. These people who see and understand from even nature, or their own conscience that there is a God are without excuse, but people who have no ability to understand that they are responsible for their actions are not responsible for their actions.

To give an example of this from my own life, I would like to tell you about two aunts of my wife. These aunts are twins and were born severely mentally retarded. They have the understanding of probably a two or three year old, and they have lived their entire lives in this condition. Are they able to understand the need of salvation? No, they don't. Are they held accountable before God for their actions? No, Jesus' blood, that was shed, is good for them even though they will never understand or accept it on this earth. Yes, babies, young children, and people who are severely mentally retarded will go to heaven when they die! God loves these little ones, and in His grace, saves them! "Take heed that you do not despise one of these little ones, for I say to you that in heaven their angels always see the face of My Father who is in heaven.", Matthew 18: 10.

(All the verses in this article are taken from the New King James Version of the Bible)

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