

Age of Accountability

When a baby or young child dies, where do they go? Let's search God's Word:

When Israel complained in the wilderness, God said that all those from twenty years old and above would fall in the wilderness, but He swore to bring their little ones – who had no knowledge of good and evil – into the Promised Land.¹ It is therefore clear that God did not hold the children accountable for this sin.

Another case is when King David's young child died. David said "I shall go to him, but he shall not return to me."² And, of course, David joined his son in Paradise when he died.³

Further indication is found in the Book of Jonah. God reasons to Jonah "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...?"⁴ Here God is apparently referring to the children who were not old enough to discern between right and wrong, as well as any other persons who could not discern between good and evil.

Most importantly Jesus Himself said: "Assuredly, I say to you, unless you are converted and become as little children, you will by no means enter the kingdom of heaven."⁵ Later He reiterated "Let the little children come to Me, and do not forbid them; for of such is the kingdom of heaven."⁶

Scripture states that Jesus is the propitiation for the sins of the whole world.⁷ Because Jesus died for the sins of the whole world, these and other Scriptures indicate that those who do not yet understand good and evil are covered by His blood.⁸

Sometimes, we as fallen human beings, foolishly think that we are more upright or compassionate than God. This is utter nonsense. The truth is we would not even know right from wrong unless the Lord gave us His moral law in the first place.⁹

Though the Bible does not directly state that all children who die under the age of accountability go to heaven, we can be absolutely assured that the Judge of all the earth will always do right.¹⁰

"The Lord is righteous in her midst, He will do no unrighteousness. Every morning He brings His justice to light; He never fails" (Zephaniah 3:5).

"God is love" (1 John 4:8).

¹ Numbers 14:29-32; Deuteronomy 1:39. See also: Hebrews 11:24-25 – Moses "became of age" at 40 years old (Acts 7:23) and chose to follow the people of God rather than the pleasures of this temporary world.

² 2 Samuel 12:23

³ Psalm 23:6

⁴ Jonah 4:11. See also: Genesis 18:25; Isaiah 7:16

⁵ Matthew 18:3

⁶ Matthew 19:14

⁷ 1 John 2:2

⁸ John 1:29; Romans 5:18; Colossians 1:19-20; 1 Timothy 2:5-6; Hebrews 11:24; etc.

⁹ Romans 2:14-15

¹⁰ Genesis 18:25

Other Scriptures that imply an age of accountability are:

“All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned, every one, to his own way; and the LORD has laid on Him the iniquity of us all” (Isaiah 53:6).

Notice, in order to turn to our own way presumes we were once His sheep and in His fold. We can't go astray unless we were at one point in the Shepherd's fold.

“For you were like sheep going astray, but have now returned to the Shepherd and Overseer of your souls” (1 Peter 2:25).

“Behold, all souls are Mine; the soul of the father as well as the soul of the son is Mine; the soul who sins shall die” (Ezekiel 18:4).

God owns every soul. Before the age of accountability – before a person willingly chooses sin – they are the Lord's.

“Assuredly, I say to you, all sins will be forgiven the sons of men, and whatever blasphemies they may utter; but he who blasphemes against the Holy Spirit never has forgiveness, but is subject to eternal condemnation” (Mark 3:28-29).

Jesus explains that the only sin leading to eternal condemnation is rejecting Him. Children who do not yet know right from wrong obviously cannot commit this sin.