

Age of Accountability

When an aborted baby, a child, or any person who has not reached the point of understanding 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.

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

In the Book of Jonah, God reasons with His reluctant prophet "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 and compassionate than God. The truth is we would not even know right from wrong unless the Lord gave us a conscience and wrote His moral law on our hearts.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 all His ways, Gracious in all His works" (Psalm 145:17).

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 a point of accountability:

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

“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. Therefore, those who have not yet turned away remain in the Lord's fold and care.

“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 ultimate sin leading to eternal condemnation is rejecting Him. Children or anyone who does not yet know right from wrong obviously cannot commit this sin.

“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).

“For this is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Savior, who desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth” (1 Timothy 2:3-4).

From these and many other verses, we can be assured God will deal fairly and justly with all people. Though this short life will have tribulation, God will be eternally fair to all.

Accountability and the Rapture

Will those who have not reached the point of accountability be Raptured before the Great Tribulation? Jesus said that everyone would experience pain and tribulation (Mark 9:49; John 16:33). And in the past, when God has judged a nation (or the world during the Flood) He has not spared the children or infirm from physical suffering and death. Of course God will take all who have placed their faith in Him, and children and special needs people tend to be the most open to the Gospel and many have received the Lord. So all believers will be Raptured, and God will meet out eternal judgment fairly to all.