

Heaven For Those Who Can't Believe

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The question has often been asked in light of exclusivism, "Are infants who die and imbeciles who live saved?" There are a variety of answers: 1) No, they do not believe and therefore cannot be saved. 2) Yes, but only the elect babies are saved the non-elect go to hell. 3) Yes, all infants are saved.

The scripture is less than dogmatic and hence answering this theological question is difficult. However, here are some things to consider. It is true that all have sinned and this includes newborn infants who are born in sin (Rom 3:19-23, 6: 23, Psalm 51). It is true that no one is saved apart from the work of Christ on the cross. It is true that infants cannot believe the gospel or respond to natural revelation. However the scripture also provides these insights from the mind and heart of God:

There are apparent examples in Scripture of infants who were saved. John the Baptist was filled with the Spirit while yet in his mother's womb (Luke 1:15). In Luke's theology, being filled with the Spirit is consistently seen as an aspect of the Spirit's work among those who are regenerate (Luke 1:41, 67; Acts 2:4; 4:8, 31; 6:3, 5; 9:17; 11:24). King David, hundreds of years before John the Baptist, wrote: "Yet you are he who took me from the womb; *you made me trust you* at my mother's breasts. On you was I cast from my birth, *and from my mother's womb you have been my God*" (Psalm 22:9-10). David evidently was in a saving relationship with God from his mother's womb.

King David had a child by Bathsheba who died in infancy. David's comments in his sorrow are significant: "While the child was yet alive, I fasted and wept; for I said, Who can tell *whether* GOD 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" (2 Samuel 12:22-23). The inclination of this passage is that David believed that he would be reunited with his child in the next life. He knew the baby, having died, could not come back to this life, however he believed that he would go to him. While this is not dogmatic proof that such a passage teaches infant salvation, yet it does seem to point in that direction.

It is true that a person is condemned for rejecting Jesus Christ and for refusing to believe in Him: "He that believeth on Him is not condemned; but he that believeth not is condemned already, because he hath not believed in the Name of the only begotten Son of God" (John 3:18). It seems that an infant is not yet capable of rejecting Jesus Christ. An infant is incapable of committing the sin mentioned in John 16:9. Though we human beings are under the penalty of everlasting judgment and death because of the fall of our race into sin and the sinful nature that we all have, nevertheless God only executes this judgment on those who have the natural capacity to see his glory and understand his will, and refuse to embrace it. Infants do not yet have that capacity; and therefore He brings them under the forgiving blood of his Son in His inscrutable way.

Those who go to hell in 2 Thessalonians 1:8-9 are those who have deliberately disobeyed the gospel by refusing to believe on the Lord Jesus Christ. Infants have not willfully disobeyed the gospel. Notice that the heathen, who are not under the hearing of the gospel, are condemned

for rejecting the lesser or general/natural revelation that God has given to them (Rom. 1:20-21, etc.). But an infant would also be incapable of rejecting this lesser revelation.

Revelation 20:11-15 indicates that all of the unsaved are resurrected to appear before the Great White Throne, and twice it is stressed that each will be judged according to their works. How can infants be included, if they have never done any works or committed acts of sin?

Consider the compassionate heart of God for those who are lost: "Who will have all men to be saved and to come unto the knowledge of the truth" (1 Tim. 2:4--this is God's desire). "Not willing that any should perish" (2 Pet. 3:9). "Even so it is not the will of your Father, who is in heaven, that one of these little ones should perish" (Matt. 18:14). "I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked" (Ezekiel 33:11). While these verses do not refer specifically to infants, they do teach us that the loving and merciful heart of our God desires the salvation of all men.

We know that the Lord Jesus had a tender and compassionate heart for the little children and was displeased when His disciples were hindering them from coming to Him (Mark 10:13-14). Is it not right to assume that the Savior has this same kind of compassion for infants?

Conclusion-

It is important to emphasize that God is *not* saving infants because they are innocent. They are not innocent, but guilty. He is saving them because, although they are sinful, *in his mercy* he desires that compassion be exercised upon those who are sinful and yet lack the capacity to grasp the truth revealed about Him in nature and to the human heart. As always the great theme of the Bible is the Grace of God.