

Do All Babies Go to Heaven?

Pertinent passages:

Gen 8:21 says we are evil from our youth. This word (נעורים) refers to a stage of time and can mean babies in a few cases but most of the time means youth or puberty. From the majority of uses of this term and its cognate (נער) it teaches that sometime in our youth we act out our sinful nature and can be understood as evil because of that. This does not mean we are sinful from birth. Those who appeal to Psalm 51:5 ignore the poetic genre of the passage and would then have to concede to the contradiction that one is born sinful as well as born actively leaning on God if one ignores the genre of Psalm 71:6 as well. Even if one interprets Psalm 51:5 literally it does not necessarily imply that David sinned at birth (it does not explicitly state this), but rather he was brought into the world surrounded by sin and inherited a sinful nature.

Deut 1:34-39: The children are not punished and it says they had no knowledge of good or evil. Romans 2:15 (see also 1 John 3:21) says one's conscience can excuse the person from what may have appeared to be sin (presupposing it is not blank due to searing 1 Tim 4:2). If babies have no conscience (from the words "with" and "knowledge") they will not be held accountable – excused. See 1 Kings 14:12-13 and Isaiah 7:16 for further examples of this.

2 Sam 12:23: Here David is sure his baby will go to heaven because he was sure he was going to heaven (Psalm 16:10-11). Some suggest he either simply meant the realm of the dead or that his son was going to heaven because of his covenant relationship, but realm of the dead would not have brought David comfort as it surely did in this passage and covenant relationship of the parent was not a guarantee of salvation as is seen in the rebellious children of godly parents.

Matt 18:1-4: Jesus uses children as the example of how we should be in order to enter heaven so he assumes they are going to heaven. 19:13-15 he states the kingdom of heaven belongs to them.

Romans 7:9: Paul teaches an "age of accountability." He says there was a time where he was not under the law, at least as far as eternal punishment is concerned, but then the time came when he understood right and wrong and sin sprang up and he "died" or came under the penalty of eternal punishment. Other places indicate we are spiritually dead all of our life (Eph 2:1-3) and are under the penalty or at least consequence of Adam's sin as seen in the fact that everyone including babies die (Romans 5:12), so it seems he means coming under the penalty of eternal punishment when he says he died.

Deuteronomy 24:16: This passage states that a child will not be punished for his or her parent's sin. Ezekiel 18 makes this same point. This does not rule out that we suffer the consequences of our father's sins as well as our first father Adam who was our representative, but it does seem to rule out any culpability on our part. To suggest we sinned with Adam is to support the preexistence of the soul, which is a false doctrine.

One may be able to say we sinned in the sense that Adam as our representative sinned and therefore we suffer the consequences; this seems to be the point of Romans 5:12-21. Romans 5:14 makes it clear that we didn't sin the sin of Adam, but rather simply suffer as being under his representation (corporate identity is seen here) and suffer for our own sins once committed. Those who embrace Christ benefit from his representation as our second Adam.

Summary of passages: No passage of Scripture declares that a baby will suffer eternal hell because of sin. Several passages describe the innocence of babies at least concerning known sin, which is all they will be held accountable for according to the passages concerning conscience. Jesus' treatment of children and words stating the kingdom of heaven belongs to them indicate they would go to heaven if they die as babies. Though some disagree with the idea of an age of accountability, it seems to be the best interpretation of Romans 7:9, especially in light of the others passages mentioned. Because of these passages it seems inappropriate to suggest any other idea than the truth that all babies go to heaven. This assessment agrees with natural observation. Few see babies as evil, but it appears that as they grow up they inevitably act out a sinful nature that seems to have been there all along. Because of natural observation and clear Biblical statements supporting the non-culpability of babies and no clear passages to the contrary, the Christian should endorse the idea that all babies go to heaven. This proposal brings glory to God because it reveals that even in areas with little witness of the gospel multitudes will go to heaven if they die as babies. It also brings consolation to the Christian who is grieved by the evil practice of abortion, to know that those innocent babies go to heaven in spite of the vicious attack of their mother; justice is brought forth. Our God always does what is right and therefore does not hold a baby eternally responsible for Adam's sin.

On a side note: Some Calvinists have tried to support that all babies deserve hell but if the baby was elect he or she would go to heaven. This view completely distorts the clear teaching of Scripture that apart from faith no one can be saved; there is no such thing as proxy salvation therefore those endorsing this idea really are supporting the idea that all babies go to hell including the ones Jesus said possessed the kingdom of heaven.