

When an infant (baby) dies?

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When an infant dies do they go to heaven? I am especially interested in non-covenant children.

This is a difficult issue. While Reformed theologians have not fully agreed on an answer ([When a Baby Dies](#)), I personally believe that all elect infants, dying in infancy, go to heaven (new heavens and new earth). However, who are the elect infants?

Original Sin

All are born into sin (Ps. 51:5) and thus "by nature are the children of wrath" (Eph. 2:3). This is original sin and it is universal (save for Christ who was born of the virgin Mary - Matt. 1:18-25). Our fallen nature, being what it is, then requires "any" who will see or enter the kingdom of God to be born again (Rev. 21:27; John 3:1-12). This is an act of grace alone (John 1:13; 6:44, 65; Rom. 9:16; Eph. 2:8-10).

Original sin is a yoke for all (Rom. 5:12-19). This is true even of infants. Though infants cannot discern good from evil (Deut. 1:39), they are not innocent; they simply have not sufficiently matured to express their sin nature in a noticeable manner (yet!). Adam's sin has been imputed to the human race. Because of our union with Adam, we are all guilty of the first sin. Those who today in their sinful state believe they would have differed than the first Adam merely look at a fool in the mirror; as the first Adam made his decision from a complete state of sinlessness! All since Adam do not begin in such a state of purity!!!

The doctrine of original sin is difficult for some to understand. Some would like to do away with this doctrine of original sin saying it is unjust. However, without this doctrine, neither could "any" be saved. As Paul teaches us:

Romans 5:12-19 Therefore, just as sin entered the world through one man, and death through sin, and in this way death came to all men, because all sinned - for before the law was given, sin was in the world. But sin is not taken into account when there is no law. Nevertheless, death reigned from the time of Adam to the time of Moses, even over those who did not sin by breaking a command, as did Adam, who was a pattern of the one to come. But the gift is not like the trespass. For if the many died by the trespass of the one man, how much more did God's grace and the gift that came by the grace of the one man, Jesus Christ, overflow to the many! Again, the gift of God is not like the result of the one man's sin: The judgment followed one sin and brought condemnation, but the gift followed many trespasses and brought justification. For if, by the trespass of the one man, death reigned through that one man, how much more will those who receive God's abundant provision of grace and of the gift of righteousness reign in life through the one man, Jesus Christ. Consequently, just as the result of one trespass was condemnation for all men, so also the result of one act of righteousness was justification that brings life for all men. For just as through the disobedience of the one man the many were made sinners, so also through the obedience of the one man the many will be made righteous.

As one may read, if we do away with the doctrine of original sin (that all men, save Christ, are under their Federal Head - the sinner Adam) then there can be no salvation - as Christ could not be the Federal Head of the elect. So, original sin is a truthful, necessary, and informing doctrine. To deny the doctrine of Federal Headship is to deny the very gospel itself.

Covenantal Infants

So, the life, death, burial and resurrection of Christ, the second and last Adam (1 Cor. 15:45, 47), saves many

(the elect, the sheep, the invisible church, etc.).

David was born into sin (Ps. 51:5), but from his mother's womb, he also appeared to have a saving relationship with God (Ps. 22:9-10). Concerning Jeremiah it is written, "Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, before you were born I set you apart; I appointed you as a prophet to the nations" (Jer. 1:5). Additionally, John the Baptist was filled with the Spirit while he was yet in his the womb (Luke 1:15, 41-44). In Lukian theology, being "filled with the Spirit" is consistent with being born again (Luke 1:67; Acts 2:4; 4:8, 31; 6:3-5; 9:17; 11:24, etc.).

So, I have every confidence that those who are members of covenant families and die as infants are regenerated by the grace by God who works when, where, and how he pleases. Although the regeneration of infants does not seem to be God's usual way of working, it is one of his ways nonetheless. As one of my previous seminary professors, Ronald Nash, wrote, "If this sort of thing happens even once, it can certainly happen in other cases" (*When a Baby Dies*, Zondervan, 1999).

The Westminster Confession of Faith uses very precise wording on this matter: "Elect infants, dying in infancy, are regenerated, and saved by Christ, through the Spirit, who worketh when, and where, and how he pleaseth: so also are all other elect persons who are incapable of being outwardly called by the ministry of the Word" (WCF 10.3). Note, however that the WCF does not say that "all" infants dying in infancy are regenerated, but that the Holy Spirit works as he pleases in elect infants (cf. Luke 18:15-16; 1:39-44) and those "who are incapable of being outwardly called by the ministry of the Word."

Non-Covenantal Infants

Dealing with the issue of non-covenantal infants is more difficult. The psalmist writes, "Even from birth the wicked go astray; from the womb they are wayward and speak lies" (Ps. 58:3). They too are in original sin, and as they grow they will reveal their total depravity. Moreover, I have not found a single biblical example of a dying non-covenantal child being saved.

But, does original sin alone then condemn non-covenantal infants to hell? Though I have more confidence in the salvation of covenant infants dying in infancy being regenerated than I do non-covenantal infants, some theologians believe a biblical case can be made that non-covenantal infants may be as well:

Jesus said, "If you were blind, you would not be guilty of sin; but now that you claim you can see, your guilt remains" (John 9:41; cf. John 15:22-25). The blind are not responsible for what they cannot see. So, since an infant lacks the natural ability to "see" (Job 3:16) the revelation of God, then accordingly the infant's sin is not accounted to them.

They observe a similar principle elsewhere. Adults who do not have access to the gospel (special revelation), still have access to nature where they can see God's glory (general revelation). Therefore, God holds them accountable. Paul says they are "without excuse": "For since the creation of the world God's invisible qualities - his eternal power and divine nature - have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that men are without excuse" (Rom. 1:20). So, even if a person does not have access to the gospel, they still have access to the gospel of nature, which reveals the glory of God. However, a baby, dying in infancy has access to neither special or general revelation, therefore Paul by implication says they would have "an excuse" at the judgment.

Please note though that this is only an argument from "implication." The Bible does not "directly" address the eternal state of pagan infants. This is an important distinction to be considered.

Though the human race is totally depraved and under the just and righteous penalty of everlasting judgment, God reveals his mercy and grace to his elect under the forgiving blood of Calvary. Who are among these elect? Could they include some pagan infants (those "who are incapable of being outwardly called by the ministry of the

Word" WCF 10.3)? Should pagan infants dying in infancy be considered in a similar category as those with some forms of mental handicap/illness (cf. Dan. 4:19-37; Matt. 4:24; John 9:3)? Again, the foregoing argument is only from "implication" and a rather weak one considering God's command to destroy (*herem*, refers to the total dedication or giving over of the enemy to God) the infants of unbelievers (1 Sam 15:3-4; 2 Kings 15:13; Psa 135:8; 136:10; 137:9; Hos 13:16).

The God of the earth does what is right (Gen. 18:25). Perhaps the only way there can be any redeemed from "every tribe and language and people and nation" (Rev. 5:9; 7:9) is because some die in infancy? If "every" in this verse is suppose to be translated "each and every without exception" as opposed to "all types or all kinds" (see [Who wants all men to be saved - 1 Timothy 2:4](#)) then it would seem some from pagan nations (referring to some of their infants dying in infancy) may be saved? Again, this argument is made only by "implication" and we need to fully consider the other texts concerning unbelievers (1 Sam 15:3-4; 2 Kings 15:13; Psa 135:8; 136:10; 137:9; Hos 13:16).

Great theologians from history do not agree on this issue: Ulrich Zwingli embraced that pagan infants went to heaven, but others such as Luther, Calvin, and Knox rejected this. In 1813, the Cumberland Presbyterians revised the *Westminster Confession* to read, "All infants dying in infancy ..."; and while Southern Presbyterians refused to modify the *Confession*, they believed in the salvation of all infants dying in infancy, because they reasoned that the language of the *Confession* cannot, by any fair interpretation, be construed to teach that any of those who die in infancy are lost ("Minutes of the General Assembly," 1900. p 614. Cited in Webb, op. cit. 307).

However, no matter where we stand on the above issue we should understand that God does not save infants because they are innocent, but because of his grace and mercy (Eph. 2:8-10), for God is good and does good (Psa. 119:68). Moreover, he does not regenerate them because they have in any way merited his grace, mercy, and forgiveness, but solely because he has chosen them for eternal life (Eph. 1:4-5) and "according to the plan of him who works out everything in conformity with the purpose of his will" (Eph. 1:11). He applied the saving benefits of the blood of Christ to them apart from conscious faith in this life. As the *Westminster Confession of Faith* says, "Elect infants, dying in infancy, are regenerated, and saved by Christ, through the Spirit, who worketh when, and where, and how he pleaseth: so also are all other elect persons who are incapable of being outwardly called by the ministry of the Word" (10.3). As to who these elect are, God alone knows.