

# Is Any Knowledge Required for Salvation?

## **Introduction**

One item that the New Testament brings up, many times, is that knowledge about God and Jesus is *necessary* for salvation. In other words, in order for people to be granted eternal life, they need to *understand* about God and His Son. Here are some examples of this:

### **John 17:1-3 (ESV):**

<sup>1</sup>When Jesus had spoken these words, he lifted up his eyes to heaven, and said, "Father, the hour has come; glorify your Son that the Son may glorify you, <sup>2</sup>since you have given him authority over all flesh, to give eternal life to all whom you have given him. <sup>3</sup> And this is eternal life, that they know you the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent.

### **John 20:30-31 (ESV):**

<sup>30</sup> Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book; <sup>31</sup> but these are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.

### **2 Timothy 3:14-15 (ESV):**

<sup>14</sup>But as for you, continue in what you have learned and have firmly believed, knowing from whom you learned it <sup>15</sup>and how from childhood you have been acquainted with the sacred writings, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus.

### **2 Peter 1:2-4 (NIV):**

<sup>2</sup> Grace and peace be yours in abundance through the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord.

<sup>3</sup> His divine power has given us everything we need for a godly life through our knowledge of him who called us by his own glory and goodness. <sup>4</sup> Through these he has given us his very great and precious promises, so that through them you may participate in the divine nature, having escaped the corruption in the world caused by evil desires.

### **1 John 5:10-13 (ESV):**

<sup>10</sup>Whoever believes in the Son of God has the testimony in himself. Whoever does not believe God has made him a liar, because he has not believed in the testimony that God has borne concerning his Son. <sup>11</sup>And this is the testimony, that God gave us eternal life, and this life is in his Son. <sup>12</sup>Whoever has the Son has life; whoever does not have the Son of God does not have life. <sup>13</sup>I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God that you may know that you have eternal life.

In addition, the apostle Paul tells us that people *cannot* obtain knowledge about God and Jesus, *unless* they hear about God from other people. (In other words, we are not able to just "figure out" that knowledge on our own).

### **Romans 10:13-15 (ESV):**

<sup>13</sup>For “everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.” <sup>14</sup>How then will they call on him in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in him of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without someone preaching? <sup>15</sup>And how are they to preach unless they are sent? As it is written, “How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the good news!”

So, from all of the above information, the following three points appear to be true:

- In order for a person to be saved, he needs to **believe** that Jesus is the Son of God.
- In order for a person to start believing in Jesus, he needs to **understand** about God and Jesus.
- In order for a person to understand about God and Jesus, he need to **hear** about them from someone else.

Of course, those three points lead to *another* important question.

### **Has everyone heard about God and Jesus?**

During the 2,000 years since Jesus walked the earth, there have been (literally) *millions upon millions* of people who have lived and died, without **ever** hearing about God and Jesus. In other words, those people never heard about Yahweh or His Son – not even one time.

Of course, from the points above, it is necessary for people to hear about God and Jesus, in order for them to have *any hope* of being saved. Basically, people need to *hear* about Jesus in order to *understand* about him; and they need to *understand* about Jesus in order to *believe* in him – and, of course, they need to *believe* in Jesus in order to be saved.

So, if a person has never heard about Jesus, then that means that that person *never had the opportunity to be saved*.

Also note the following: some people are mentally incapable of understanding about God and Jesus – *even if* someone gives them that information. Consider this scenario: a newborn baby dies, *five minutes* after he is born. Even if people tell the baby about God and Jesus during that five minutes, the baby is not going to *understand* that information. As a result, the baby will not have any opportunity to believe in Jesus – and be saved. (This same scenario also applies to people who have very severe mental disabilities.)

This information, in turn, brings up an *additional* question.

### **Does God want everyone to be saved?**

Scripture is pretty clear that God wants *everyone* to be saved. In other words, God does not want *anyone* to be condemned to everlasting death. Consider these verses:

### 1 Timothy 2:4 (ESV):

<sup>3</sup>This is good, and it is pleasing in the sight of God our Savior, <sup>4</sup>who desires all people to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth.

### 2 Peter 3:9 (ESV):

<sup>9</sup> The Lord is not slow to fulfill his promise as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance.

From the above verses, it certainly appears that God wants *every* person, who has *ever* lived, to be granted everlasting life.

However, some churches disagree – some churches state that that God does not actually want *every single person* to be saved. Instead, those churches claim that God **only** wants people who currently believe in Jesus to be saved.

So, is that belief true? Consider this verse:

### 1 Timothy 4:10 (ESV):

<sup>10</sup>For to this end we toil and strive, because we have our hope set on the living God, who is the Savior of all people, especially of those who believe.

From what I can see, that verse tells us that God will offer salvation to *every single person* – especially (but **NOT** only) to those people who *currently* believe in Jesus.

### An apparent dilemma

So, here is a summary of the information so far:

- God wants every single person to be saved – i.e., He wants *everyone* to be granted eternal life.
- In order for a person to be saved, he needs to *hear* about God and Jesus from someone *else*.
- Millions of people *never* heard about God and Jesus – not even once – during their entire lifetimes.

As a result, there is an apparent dilemma: God wants *everyone* to be saved – but an enormous number of people *never* had any opportunity to be saved!

So, the question now is: what is going to happen to people who are “ignorant” of Jesus, when Jesus returns? This question is especially relevant to people who were unable to understand about Jesus – such as infants who have died.

## Two different doctrines

From what I have seen, most Christian churches never even *address* this question of “ignorant” people. In other words, most churches do not have *any* official belief at all, about the ultimate fate of people who have died, without ever hearing about Jesus.

However, there are some churches that try to at least *partially* address this question. In particular, those churches do have official beliefs about people who were incapable of understanding about Jesus – such as infants who have died.

The beliefs of those churches fall into two basic categories:

Doctrine 1: One doctrine states that *all* dead infants will be resurrected to **everlasting life**, immediately after Jesus returns.

Doctrine 2: Another doctrine states that *all* dead infants will be relegated to **everlasting death**, when Jesus returns.

So, let’s investigate those two doctrines.

### Doctrine 1: Automatic **salvation** for dead infants

The first doctrine sounds very merciful, of course. That doctrine basically states that all babies who have died will “automatically” be saved. In other words, all dead infants will be given a “free pass” to everlasting life.

However, is that doctrine true? Is it really true that an infant who dies will *automatically* be saved? First off, consider these passages:

#### **Psalms 51:5 (ESV):**

<sup>5</sup>Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity,  
and in sin did my mother conceive me.

#### **Psalms 58:3 (ESV):**

<sup>3</sup>The wicked are estranged from the womb;  
they go astray from birth, speaking lies.

#### **Romans 3:10-11 (NIV):**

<sup>10</sup> As it is written: “There is no one righteous, not even one;  
<sup>11</sup> there is no one who understands;  
there is no one who seeks God.

The above passages indicate that no one is “naturally” righteous – not even newborn babies. As a result, it certainly appears that even infants are in need of *salvation* from God.

Now, consider these passages:

**Mark 16:15-16 (ESV):**

<sup>15</sup>And he said to them, “Go into all the world and proclaim the gospel to the whole creation. <sup>16</sup>Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved, but whoever does not believe will be condemned.

**Acts 2:37-38 (ESV):**

<sup>37</sup>Now when they [the Jews] heard this they were cut to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, “Brothers, what shall we do?” <sup>38</sup>And Peter said to them, “Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.

**Romans 10:9-10 (NIV):**

<sup>9</sup> If you declare with your mouth, “Jesus is Lord,” and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. <sup>10</sup> For it is with your heart that you believe and are justified, and it is with your mouth that you profess your faith and are saved.

From the above passages (and many others), it appears that salvation requires action on our part. In other words, salvation is **not** something that we can obtain “by default”.

So, as a result of all of the above passages, it appears to me that the “automatic salvation for dead infants” doctrine is not correct.

Doctrine 2: Automatic **destruction** of dead infants

The second doctrine strikes me as being extremely cruel – it means that dead infants will be *permanently destroyed*, simply because they died before they developed the *mental capacity* to understand about Jesus.

Not only is this doctrine cruel, but it also appears to be **contradicted** by Scripture. For one thing, as mentioned previously, Scripture indicates that God wants everyone to be saved – **not** just those people who *currently* believe in Jesus. (See 1 Timothy 2:4, 2 Peter 3:9 and 1 Timothy 4:10, above.) In addition, dead infants never had *any* opportunity to be saved, during their brief lifetimes. As a result, it looks extremely unlikely to me that God would just “forget about” babies who have died.

Another point to note is that God has given Jesus the authorization to judge people. In other words, it is *Jesus* who will decide which people will be saved, and which people will be condemned. So, let’s take a look at Jesus’ view of young children:

**Luke 18:15-17 (NIV):**

<sup>15</sup> People were also bringing babies to Jesus for him to place his hands on them. When the disciples saw this, they rebuked them. <sup>16</sup> But Jesus called the children to him and said, “Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these. <sup>17</sup> Truly I tell you, anyone who will not receive the kingdom of God like a little child will never enter it.”

**Matthew 18:1-4 (ESV):**

<sup>1</sup> At that time the disciples came to Jesus, saying, "Who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?" <sup>2</sup>And calling to him a child, he put him in the midst of them <sup>3</sup>and said, "Truly, I say to you, unless you turn and become like children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven. <sup>4</sup> Whoever humbles himself like this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven.

From the above passages, I find it *extraordinarily* unlikely that Jesus will simply "ignore" little babies who have died, when he returns. As a result, the "automatic destruction of dead infants" doctrine definitely does **not** appear correct to me.

### **A third possibility**

As mentioned above, the two main doctrines about the fate of "ignorant" people do not appear correct to me. In other words, those two doctrines do not appear to be "consistent" with Scripture.

So, the question now is: are those two doctrines the only possibilities? Or could it be that there is a *another* doctrine, that is consistent with Scripture?

Here are some thoughts about a **third** possibility, for the ultimate fate of ignorant people.

Two different ages: The first point to note is that there are two basic "ages" – or "periods of time" – that are described in Scripture. Those ages are usually described as the "current time", and the "age to come". Here are two of the most explicit mentions of those two ages (from Jesus):

#### **Mark 10:29-30 (ESV):**

<sup>29</sup>Jesus said, "Truly, I say to you, there is no one who has left house or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or lands, for my sake and for the gospel, <sup>30</sup>who will not receive a hundredfold now in this time, houses and brothers and sisters and mothers and children and lands, with persecutions, and in the age to come eternal life.

#### **Luke 18:29-30 (ESV):**

<sup>29</sup>And he said to them, "Truly, I say to you, there is no one who has left house or wife or brothers or parents or children, for the sake of the kingdom of God, <sup>30</sup>who will not receive many times more in this time, and in the age to come eternal life."

The "millennium" subdivision: Another item to be aware of is that the "age to come" has a very specific "subdivision" within it. Basically, the first 1,000 years of that age will be ruled by Jesus – along with his faithful Christians. *After* that thousand years, Jesus will hand over the kingdom to our Heavenly Father. Here are two passages which corroborate that information:

#### **Revelation 20:4-6 (NIV):**

<sup>4</sup> I saw thrones on which were seated those who had been given authority to judge. And I saw the souls of those who had been beheaded because of their testimony about Jesus and because of the word of God. They had not worshiped the beast or its image and had not received its mark on their foreheads or their hands. They came to life and reigned with Christ a thousand years. <sup>5</sup> (The rest of the dead did not come to life until the thousand years were ended.) This is the first resurrection. <sup>6</sup> Blessed and holy are those who share in the first resurrection. The second death

has no power over them, but they will be priests of God and of Christ and will reign with him for a thousand years.

### **1 Corinthians 15:24-28 (ESV):**

<sup>24</sup>Then comes the end, when he [Jesus] delivers the kingdom to God the Father after destroying every rule and every authority and power. <sup>25</sup>For he must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet. <sup>26</sup>The last enemy to be destroyed is death. <sup>27</sup>For “God has put all things in subjection under his feet.” But when it says, “all things are put in subjection,” it is plain that he is excepted who put all things in subjection under him. <sup>28</sup>When all things are subjected to him, then the Son himself will also be subjected to him who put all things in subjection under him, that God may be all in all.

### The “white throne” judgement

After the end of the millennium, Jesus will judge every person who has *not* already been saved. This is the so called “white throne” judgement.

Note: all of the people who will be judged at the white throne are people who were not Christians during this *current* age – because if they *had* been Christians during this age, then they would *already* be immortal at that point.

Here is the description of the white throne judgement:

### **Revelation 20:11-15 (ESV):**

<sup>11</sup>Then I saw a great white throne and him who was seated on it. From his presence earth and sky fled away, and no place was found for them. <sup>12</sup>And I saw the dead, great and small, standing before the throne, and books were opened. Then another book was opened, which is the book of life. And the dead were judged by what was written in the books, according to what they had done. <sup>13</sup>And the sea gave up the dead who were in it, Death and Hades gave up the dead who were in them, and they were judged, each one of them, according to what they had done. <sup>14</sup>Then Death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. This is the second death, the lake of fire. <sup>15</sup>And if anyone’s name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire.

Notice the wording in the last verse: “**If** anyone’s name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire.” That wording certainly appears to indicate that some people’s names **will** be found in the book of life.

In other words, it appears that some people who were **not** Christians during this age, will end up being **saved!**

Of course, as noted in the introduction, it is necessary for people to *believe in Jesus*, in order to be saved. So, how is it *possible* that some people who were not Christians during this age will be able to be saved?

### Two different resurrections

Scripture tells us that there will be two different *types* of resurrections – a resurrection of “life”, and a resurrection of “judgement”:

**John 5:28-29 (ESV):**

<sup>28</sup>Do not marvel at this, for an hour is coming when all who are in the tombs will hear his voice  
<sup>29</sup>and come out, those who have done good to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil to the resurrection of judgment.

Similarly, there are two different “classes” of people who will be resurrected – the “just” and the “unjust”:

**Acts 24:14-15 (ESV):**

<sup>14</sup>But this I confess to you, that according to the Way, which they call a sect, I worship the God of our fathers, believing everything laid down by the Law and written in the Prophets, <sup>15</sup>having a hope in God, which these men themselves accept, that there will be a resurrection of both the just and the unjust.

The resurrection of “life” is presumably the resurrection to *immortal* life. In other words, that resurrection will *immediately* grant people **everlasting** life. This resurrection is also presumably the “first” resurrection, referred to in Revelation 20:4-6, above. In other words, the saints listed in Revelation 20:6 will evidently be resurrected during the resurrection of *life* – and they will therefore become immortal *immediately* after their resurrections.

The resurrection of “judgment”, on the other hand, does not cause people to become immortal. Instead, that resurrection presumably brings people to **mortal** life – i.e., life similar to the life we all have now.

So, the question now is: what does the word “judgment” mean in this context? In other words, does “judgment” here basically mean “pronouncing a sentence” – like a judge in a courtroom, at the end of a trial?

If judgment *does* mean “pronouncing a sentence”, then how could anyone who comes to life during that resurrection be saved? Remember – all of the people who will be resurrected at that time are people who were not Christians during this age. So, if all of those people have sentences pronounced on them, immediately after they are resurrected, then how could any of them be saved?

Of course, as mentioned above, it appears that some people who were not Christians **will** be saved, at the “white throne” judgement. So, it appears that “judgement”, in this context, does *not* mean an immediate “sentencing” of people.

The Greek word that is translated as “judgement” in John 5:29 is *krisis*. (The English word “crisis” comes from that Greek word.) From what I understand, *krisis* has this basic meaning: “A dangerous, or stressful, period of time”.

As a result, it appears that people who are raised during the resurrection of judgement will be given a *period of time* to live – as mortals. That period of time will then give those people the opportunity to **learn** about God and Jesus – and for them to decide to **follow** Jesus.

In other words, it appears that the “resurrection of judgement” refers to a period of time – in the future – during which the *actions* of unsaved people will be *judged*.



If the above information is true, then that would explain why some people who were not Christians during *this* age will end up being *saved* – it is because those people *will become* Christians, in the *next* age!

## Conclusion

From all of the above information, it appears to me that the following events will happen to “ignorant” people who have died (especially to infants who have died):

- At some point *after* Jesus returns, ignorant people will be *resurrected*. However, they will be resurrected with **mortal** bodies – not immortal bodies.

- After that, those people will be given some *finite* period of time, to learn about God and Jesus – and to follow Jesus as their lord.

- If those people do follow Jesus, then they will eventually be granted everlasting life. However, if they consistently refuse to follow Jesus, then they will eventually die.

So, a basic “synopsis” of this overall doctrine is as follows:

Infants who have died will have an *opportunity* to be saved. In fact, they will have the same opportunity to be saved as *we* have had. The only difference is that they will have their salvation opportunity in the next age – the “Kingdom” age – *instead* of in this age.

I call this overall belief the “Kingdom age salvation” doctrine.

Of course, I am the first to admit that there is no *explicit* mention in Scripture of this doctrine. As a result, there is no *guarantee* that this doctrine is correct.

However, this doctrine certainly appears to be *far* more likely than the other two doctrines discussed in this post – the “automatic salvation” and “automatic destruction” doctrines.

Finally, note that a related document on this topic can be found at this link:

[The resurrection of “ignorant” people](#)