



"From the cowardice that shrinks from new truth, from the laziness that is content with half truths, from the arrogance that thinks it knows all truth, O, God of Truth, deliver us."

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Age Of Accountability

— Search for and answer.

By Elder Arza Boswell – Ravenwood, MO

Jason was so special. Why? He would never excel in sports. As a matter of fact, when he was only a few weeks old, it became apparent he was severally handicapped and we were concerned that he might not ever be able to walk. Other questions came to our mind. Would he be able to sit up? Would he even be able to talk? Would he ever go to school?

One thing we hadn't taken into consideration was Jason's determination. So what happened? Jason ended up accomplishing all those things we were concerned about, to a lesser degree than most, but he gave it his best effort.

Jason had a mother and father who spent endless hours helping him, making sure that he had every opportunity to reach his full potential. He spent most of his school years with a special group of students and had a wonderful teacher, who moved along with the group as they went from one level to the next. Jason was a competitor and Special Olympics had a special appeal and interest for him.

This is to introduce you to my grandson. We spent many hours together. I loved him like a son. When he died suddenly, while practicing for Special Olympics competition, it nearly broke my heart. The grief process for me was long and difficult. You see, Jason was twenty-three years old, and though he attended church on a regular basis and participated in all activities to the best of his ability, Jason had never been baptized. I called on my knowledge of the Scriptures for an answer and the struggle was a long one. Let me tell you about it.

My active participation in Christianity at the time of this writing had spanned a period of fifty-seven years. During that time I had heard over and over the term, "Age of Accountability". However, I don't recall ever discussing it in depth, hearing a sermon about it, or reading in the many periodicals any articles regarding it. Why not? It is vitally important in understanding God's direction for our lives.

Because of the many questions on the subject and the scarcity of answers from several scholarly individuals who I thought could lead me through this thirsty void, and because of the death of my twenty-three year old handicapped grandson, in March of 2002, I undertook a Spiritual search of my own.

In the year 2004, I read through the Bible with a determination to settle this "Age of Accountability" question in my mind. I am not a scholar. My analysis will not meet the criterion of those who are, but it will help me to put to rest questions, which have disturbed me.

Scriptures I will use are from the NASB unless designated otherwise. They are not new to me, but with this search in mind, some will take on special significance. Let me begin with a question. Does God specify an age of accountability as far as Abraham's descendants are concerned? I believe He does.

No less than ten times, in the NASB we read these words: "Twenty years old and upward", beginning with **Exodus 30:14**. When the children of Israel were numbered, God instructed Moses that every man should give a ransom for his soul that there be no plague among them, and in the fourteenth verse God specifies that the instructions are for those from twenty years old and upward. When ten of the spies brought a report, after spying out the Promised Land, which convinced the people not to go forward, this made God angry. In **Numbers 14:29-30a**, "God told Moses and Aaron, "Your corpses will fall in this wilderness, even all your numbered men according to your complete number, from twenty years old and upward, who have grumbled against Me. Surely you shall not come into the land in which I swore to settle you."

These and other verses I could mention indicate to me that as far as the children of Israel were concerned, God took into account an age at which people are not yet capable of making mature judgments, and these people are less responsible for decisions which they might make.

(NOTE - Editor Arza is not advocating waiting until age 21 to immerse believers.)

However a passage in **Deuteronomy 1:39** which states, "Moreover your little ones who you said would become prey, and your sons, **who this day have no knowledge of good or evil, shall enter there, and I will give it to**

them and they shall possess it” and **Nehemiah 8:3**, “He read from it before the square which was in front of the Water Gate from early morning until midday, in the presence of men and women, *those who could understand*; and all the people were attentive to the book of the law” leads me to believe that **God is not only considering age, but also the ability to reason**. This of course, was what I was looking for in the case of my grandson.

The whole assembly of the people who had returned from Babylon requested that Ezra, the scribe, bring the book of the Law of Moses, which the Lord had given to Israel. (NASB) **Nehemiah 8:2-3**, “Then Ezra the priest brought the law before the assembly of men, women **and all who could listen with understanding**, on the first day of the seventh month. He read from it before the square which was in front of the Water Gate from early morning until midday, in the presence of men and women, *those who could understand*: and all the people were attentive to the book of the law.” (*Emphasis mine. AWB*)

There is an interesting Scripture in **Isaiah 7:15b** that says, “**He knows enough to refuse evil and choose good**” The commentators seem to think this suggests the age of moral determination and responsibility under the law and they further speculate that the age would be twelve or thirteen years.

It appears to me after reading **Nehemiah 8:2** that those who were not mature enough to understand, were not expected to be in this assembly. And from reading **Deuteronomy 1:39**, “The *little ones* have no knowledge of good and evil” And again from reading **Isaiah 7:15-16** God indicates there is an age span when one does not know enough to refuse evil and choose good.

Maxine Fream Gash read these thoughts and added one of her own and I want to include it along with mine.

May I suggest another Scripture you could use about those under the age of accountability? The very last verse in the book of Jonah, God is giving Jonah reason why he is having mercy on the city of Nineveh: “And should not I have compassion on Nineveh, that great city in which there are more than 120,000 persons who do not know their right hand from their left, and also much cattle?”

In the Lamb, Maxine

My conclusion from these readings is that God excused those who were not mature enough to understand, which would not be determined by age. The determination of accountability is not really in years, but in understanding.

It fits into the equation of a child, “knowing enough to refuse evil and choose good” or in the case of Ezra’s reading of the law to those who could understand.

All this leads me to a conclusion, for now at least, that sin is not imputed to little children or even adults, which fit into this category. If the time comes when I have more understanding, I reserve the right to change my thinking.

Other verses, which lend credibility to this thinking, are verses like **Hebrews 11:6** and **Mark 16:16b**, a couple of verses, which tell us that a person must believe. They must be capable of understanding. Once again let me reiterate, the age of accountability, is only applicable when it is coupled with the ability to understand and comprehend. **Years by themselves are not a credible measuring stick.**

Much more could be said about how much a person needs to understand. How much knowledge about Jesus, God, and sin are necessary for a person to be an acceptable candidate for baptism?

God in His infinite wisdom gave His only begotten Son that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish but have everlasting life. He went to the cross to purchase our pardon by the shedding His own precious blood. He paid the price for us. He is our perpetuation. It is a free gift. We can’t earn salvation.

But it is not automatic. We have to make a choice to except that free gift and in order to do that we must believe. We must realize that we have sinned and want to turn away from those sins. We must confess our belief in Jesus Christ before men and have a desire to do what He would have us to do from that time forward. Then we are ready to enter the waters of baptism, bury the old man of sin, and rise to walk in a newness of life.

We need to be able to understand this immeasurable gift of salvation and the opportunity we have to accept it. Then we can make that choice at whatever age it might be.

With all these Scripture verses, our readily admitted immaturity, even with our best efforts to understand the answer, we may still come up with some gray area. But we can be sure that our merciful God is a righteous discerner of the thoughts and intents of our hearts and He makes no mistakes.

Jesus tells us in **Matthew 18:3**, “Truly I say unto you, unless you are converted and become as little children, you will not enter the kingdom of heaven.” And again in **Matthew 19:14**, “Let the little children alone, and do not hinder them from coming to Me, for the kingdom of heaven belongs to such as these.”

What does all this reasoning convince me of?

1. The age of accountability is determined by ability to understand, not a specific age.
2. The more we understand, the more responsibility we have.

3. The more responsibility we accept, the greater our reward will be not only in Heaven, but on earth as well.
4. That we must become as little children in many ways to receive God's blessings.

How has this study helped me understand God's mercy toward my grandson, who died at the age of 23 without having been baptized into the Lord?

Let me answer by writing down a portion of my constant prayer.

Yes, I believe Jason is safely home. I believe I will see him in his new and glorified body, free from all defects.

What a blessed reward that in itself will be.

Thank you, Precious Lord, for Your mercy and grace.

In Jesus' Name,

--Amen.