

Will Those Who Have Not Heard The Gospel Be Saved?

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Quite often Christians have often preached Salvation through Jesus as Lord and Savior - and for good reason. The Bible is a record of what God has done and said, and what he will do in the future. The Bible speaks many times of salvation, some key verses being Ephesians 2:8 which explains salvation is righteousness by faith; John 14:6 - Jesus being the only way to salvation, and other things such as repentance (Acts 2:38). Almost immediately everyone considers at least some form of the following question:

“If Jesus is the only way to salvation, what about those who have died who have never even heard of Jesus? Or anything about the God of the Bible at all?”

The Bible does have something to say about this topic. Quite fittingly, what the Bible says about this underscores the importance of the Gospel itself. Let's outline the problem into a simple, clearer format and then see what the Bible has to say about the issues at hand:

- Salvation is through Jesus Christ alone - implies that if one does not know Him, they will not be saved
- Not everyone has heard of the God of the Bible in history - whether it be Old Testament or New Testament times.
- It would seem then that some people have died without having a chance of salvation at all.

The ultimate question, then, is do these people have a chance to be in the Kingdom of Heaven? If they had no chance at all then this implies that God is unjust, only giving certain people a chance to obtain the blessing of being in heaven. Upon analysis of the Bible, this is not the case. It is *possible* for this group to be saved. Just about every culture since ancient times has

had a knowledge of God, which is proven by the fact that they all have some form of religion. This does not imply that all religions are true, but rather that all peoples and cultures have a knowledge of the existence of Divinity - God. This is why Paul writes that these people also may come to the knowledge of the true God in nature itself (Rom 1:20).

Infact, ever since the fall people have a knowledge of both good and evil. The tree that caused Adam and Eve's fall contained this (Gen 2:9). It is for this reason that Paul writes that even the Gentiles do the law instinctively:

*Romans 2:14-15*¹

14 For when Gentiles who do not have the Law do instinctively the things of the Law, these, not having the Law, are a law to themselves,

15 in that they show the work of the Law written in their hearts, their conscience bearing witness and their thoughts alternately accusing or else defending them

This does not mean that the Gentiles keep the entire law. We need special revelation as nature does not give us all of the information, and it also gives us a level of clarity not obtained through general revelation. For example, Gentiles did not know about the Passover and other such things in the Old Testament times, and were expected to learn about these things when they came through Israel:

¹ Gathercole, S. J. "A Law Unto Themselves: The Gentiles in Romans 2.14-15 Revisited." *Journal for the Study of the New Testament* 24, no. 3 (March 1, 2002): 3-26. Accessed May 22, 2019. <https://journals.sagepub.com/toc/jnta/24/3>
This passage may refer to gentile converts, however, the Greek word used here for 'instinctively' (φύσει) indicates that, convert or no, this information is in their heart naturally - and thus naturally they have a conviction to do good, reject evil, and that they themselves are in need of help as they are not innocent of doing wrong or evil.

Deut 31:12-13a

12 Assemble the people, the men and the women and children and the alien who is in your town, so that they may hear and learn and fear the Lord your God, and be careful to observe all the words of this law.

13 Their children, who have not known, will hear and learn to fear the Lord your God

People have a knowledge of good and evil, but this does not mean that they have available to them every detail as given in the Bible. If this could be obtained from nature then there would be no need for the Bible. Some have been misinformed and need to be shown the correct path to salvation - which is the reason for evangelism.

The need for Special revelation is also highlighted in Jonah. Jonah, as commanded by God, goes to preach to Nineveh that God will destroy them unless they repent. Nineveh heeds this and repents, hoping to avoid God's wrath (Jonah 3:5-9). Jonah did not like the fact that God spared them however (Jonah 4:1). Jonah leaves the city and essentially waits to see what happens to them (Jonah 4:5). After talking with God - God tells Jonah:

Jonah 4:11

Should I not have compassion on Nineveh, the great city in which there are more than 120,000 persons who do not know the difference between their right and left hand, as well as many animals?

Nineveh was the capital of Assyria at this time,² and were deceived by a false religion, worshipping false gods. God seems to have pity upon their ignorance and makes provision so that they may be warned and turn to God. The Assyrians may have come to a knowledge of the true God through nature, but that clarity was achieved by God speaking through Jonah. God forgives people's ignorance (Acts 17:30; Luke 23:34) but that does not mean He leaves them in ignorance forever, and nor should we let people live in ignorance. The Christians duty is to

² Wikipedia contributors, "Nineveh," Wikipedia, The Free Encyclopedia, <https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Nineveh&oldid=897416297> (accessed May 22, 2019).

spread the good news (Gospel) to the world and make disciples of all nations (Matt 28:18-20). By spreading this, people have an extremely better chance of coming to know the one true God, and experience the blessings offered to us from God.

Perhaps the best way to explain this is that God looks at the heart (1 Sam 16:7) and He forgives those who do not know. People do have a knowledge of good and evil and can come to seek God and learn about Him through nature. However, as we have seen there is a need for special revelation as not everything is explained in nature. People have questions that need to be answered. This world is evil (John 3:19) and if people are getting their understanding of God from nature, they will not have a clear and accurate understanding of God.³

While those who have not heard still have a chance of entering God's Kingdom, this does not mean that we are to prevent them from receiving the blessing given to us by God's word. Let us bring what God has told us to our fellow brothers and sisters so that they may come home with us, and that those who are seeking God may find Him and come to know him. God commanded us to do so - so let's do it without hesitation.

³ Barrett, Samuel. "Building A Natural Theology." Sam's Creation Blog. January 06, 2019. Accessed May 22, 2019. <https://samscreationcblog.wordpress.com/2019/01/06/building-a-natural-theology/>



Genesis 22:8

“In your seed all the nations of the earth shall be blessed, because you have obeyed My voice.”

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Bibliography

- 1) Gathercole, S. J. "A Law Unto Themselves: The Gentiles in Romans 2.14-15 Revisited." *Journal for the Study of the New Testament* 24, no. 3 (March 1, 2002): 3-26. Accessed May 22, 2019. <https://journals.sagepub.com/toc/jnta/24/3>
- 2) Wikipedia contributors, "Nineveh," *Wikipedia, The Free Encyclopedia*, <https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Nineveh&oldid=897416297> (accessed May 22, 2019).
- 3) Barrett, Samuel. "Building A Natural Theology." *Sam's Creation Blog*. January 06, 2019. Accessed May 22, 2019. <https://samscreationcblog.wordpress.com/2019/01/06/building-a-natural-theology/>