Salvation and the Grace Administration

Does “No Access” Mean No Hope?

What scripture says about those who never had the chance to hear the gospel, and where the hope for them lies.

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Table of Contents

Introduction.....3
The question, and the two truths held together.

Chapter 1: One Way to God, in Every Age.....5
What God has always looked for, and "none other name."

Chapter 2: What Scripture Says About Those Who Never Heard.....6
Light for all, a fair judgment, God seeking the seeker, and no second chance after death.

Chapter 3: The Resurrections and the Judgment.....10
Who is raised when, and the great white throne.

Chapter 4: Little Children, and Those Who Cannot Believe.....12
A time before accountability, and God's justice.

Chapter 5: So, Does "No Access" Mean No Hope?.....14
What scripture says, what it does not, where the hope lies, and what it means for us.

Copyright.....17

Sources Consulted.....17

Scripture Index.....18

Anchor Passage

> **Acts 4:12** *Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved.*
>
> **Genesis 18:25** *That be far from thee to do after this manner, to slay the righteous with the wicked: and that the righteous should be as the wicked, that be far from thee: Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?*
>
> **2 Peter 3:9** *The Lord is not slack concerning his promise, as some men count slackness; but is longsuffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance.*

Introduction

A. The Question

Picture a man living somewhere so remote that no one has ever told him about Jesus Christ. There is no church, no Bible in his language, no believer within a thousand miles. He is not rejecting the gospel; he has simply never heard it. He looks at the world around him and knows there must be a Maker. He tries to live by his conscience. And he dies.

What happens to him?

The question is not a trick, and it is not a way of avoiding the gospel. Thoughtful believers ask it, often with real grief, because they have read **"Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved" (Acts 4:12)**, and they wonder whether that verse closes a door this man never had a chance to walk through. Does "no access" mean no hope?

In short: this study asks what scripture says about people who never had the chance to hear the gospel, and whether there is hope for them.

B. Two Things Held Together

Two truths run through everything that follows, and neither may be softened to make room for the other.

First, salvation is in Jesus Christ alone. Acts 4:12 says it plainly, and so do other verses: **"For there is one God, and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus" (1 Timothy 2:5)**; **"I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me" (John 14:6)**. There is no second saviour and no second way.

Second, God is just, and He does not want anyone to perish. Abraham asked, **"Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?" (Genesis 18:25)**. Peter writes that the Lord is **"not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance" (2 Peter 3:9)**. Paul says God **"will have all men to be saved, and to come unto the knowledge of the truth" (1 Timothy 2:4)**.

The question of the man who never heard sits exactly where these two truths meet. This study does not let go of either one. It lets scripture say what it says, notes plainly where it is silent, and leaves the rest with the Judge who will do right.

In short: salvation is in Christ alone, and God is just and wills that none perish. Both are true, and this study holds them together.

C. How to Read This Study

The text. The King James Version is used throughout. Greek words are explained in plain English.

Scripture in bold. When a verse is quoted inside a sentence, the quotation and its reference are printed in bold. Longer passages are set apart with a green bar.

"In short." Every section ends with a short summary.

What the text says, and what is drawn from it. Where this study draws a conclusion scripture does not state in so many words, it says so.

A companion study. *Salvation in the Grace Administration*, published in this same library, sets out how a person is saved today and everything salvation gives. This study does not repeat it. It takes up the harder question: those who never heard.

In short: the King James text, scripture in bold, a summary for every section, and conclusions marked as conclusions.

Chapter 1: One Way to God, in Every Age

A. What God Has Always Looked For

God has dealt with mankind in different *administrations*, periods of time in which He deals with people under a stated set of terms. What a person needed to know and do to be right with God was not identical in every one of them. But one thing never changed. Hebrews states it:

> **Hebrews 11:6** *But without faith it is impossible to please him: for he that cometh to God must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him.*

Before anyone could name a coming Messiah, before there was a written Law, God looked for this: a person who believes that He is, and who seeks Him. Abel offered by faith, Enoch walked with God, Noah built the ark by faith (Hebrews 11:4-7), and of Abraham it is written: **"And he believed in the LORD; and he counted it to him for righteousness" (Genesis 15:6)**.

In short: in every age, God has looked for faith: believing that He is, and seeking Him.

B. What Changed, and What Stayed the Same

Across the administrations, the *form* of God's terms changed a great deal, and so did *how much* a person was given to believe:

- **In Eden**, there was a single command (Genesis 2:16-17).
- **From Eden to Sinai**, the patriarchs believed God's promises, and their faith was counted as righteousness (Genesis 15:6).
- **Under the Law of Moses**, Israel lived by a written covenant, with sacrifices that pointed forward. Yet even then, **"the just shall live by his faith" (Habakkuk 2:4)**.
- **In the Gospel period**, Jesus called Israel to believe on Him: **"This is the work of God, that ye believe on him whom he hath sent" (John 6:29)**.
- **In the Grace administration**, which began at Pentecost after Christ's death, resurrection and ascension, the message is complete. Christ died for our sins, was buried, and rose again (1 Corinthians 15:3-4), and is exalted at God's right hand (Acts 2:33):

  > **Romans 10:9** *That if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved.*

The content of faith grew as God revealed more. The principle never changed: God receives those who believe Him, and every one of them was saved on the ground of what Christ would do or has done. No one in any age was saved by his own merit.

In short: the form of God's terms changed, and what was revealed grew, but the principle stayed the same: faith counted as righteousness, on the ground of Christ's work.

C. "None Other Name"

Acts 4:12 was spoken by Peter to the rulers of Israel, who had demanded to know by what name he had healed a lame man (Acts 4:7). He answered: by the name of Jesus Christ, whom they had crucified and God had raised. And then: "Neither is there salvation in any other."

The verse is not softened by its setting. Paul says the same thing to Timothy (1 Timothy 2:5), and Jesus said it Himself (John 14:6). There is one name, one mediator, one way.

What Acts 4:12 states is *who* saves. What it does not state is exactly *how* that truth reaches a person who never heard the name. That is the question the rest of this study takes up.

In short: Acts 4:12 settles that salvation is in Christ alone. It does not, by itself, settle how that reaches someone who never heard.

Chapter 2: What Scripture Says About Those Who Never Heard

A. No One Is Left Without Any Light

Even a man who has never heard the gospel is not without any witness from God. Creation itself speaks:

> **Psalm 19:1** *The heavens declare the glory of God; and the firmament sheweth his handywork.*
> **Psalm 19:2** *Day unto day uttereth speech, and night unto night sheweth knowledge.*
> **Psalm 19:3** *There is no speech nor language, where their voice is not heard.*

"There is no speech nor language, where their voice is not heard." The sky preaches in every language. Paul says the same:

> **Romans 1:19** *Because that which may be known of God is manifest in them; for God hath shewed it unto them.*
> **Romans 1:20** *For the invisible things of him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even his eternal power and Godhead; so that they are without excuse:*

And when Paul preached to pagans at Lystra, who had never heard of the God of Israel, he told them: **"Nevertheless he left not himself without witness, in that he did good, and gave us rain from heaven, and fruitful seasons, filling our hearts with food and gladness" (Acts 14:17)**.

Notice what this light does and does not do. It shows that God exists, that He is powerful, and that He is good. Paul's point in Romans 1 is that people who turn from that light to idols are "without excuse." Creation's witness does not tell a man about the cross and the resurrection. But it is enough to start him seeking.

In short: everyone has some light from God, through creation and His goodness. It shows that God is, and it is enough to begin seeking Him.

B. Judged by What They Had

Romans 2 speaks directly to people who never had God's written word:

> **Romans 2:12** *For as many as have sinned without law shall also perish without law: and as many as have sinned in the law shall be judged by the law;*
> **Romans 2:13** *(For not the hearers of the law are just before God, but the doers of the law shall be justified.*

> **Romans 2:14** *For when the Gentiles, which have not the law, do by nature the things contained in the law, these, having not the law, are a law unto themselves:*
>
> **Romans 2:15** *Which shew the work of the law written in their hearts, their conscience also bearing witness, and their thoughts the mean while accusing or else excusing one another;)*
>
> **Romans 2:16** *In the day when God shall judge the secrets of men by Jesus Christ according to my gospel.*

This is the fairest statement in scripture on our question. God does not judge a person by a standard he never had. The man who never had the Law is not judged by the Law. He is judged by what he did have: the "work of the law written in their hearts," his own conscience. And notice who judges: **"God shall judge the secrets of men by Jesus Christ" (Romans 2:16)**. Even this judgment is in Christ's hands.

But Paul is not describing a second way of being saved, alongside faith in Christ. His whole argument from Romans 1 to 3 is that everyone, Jew and Gentile, falls short of whatever standard he has. He sums it up:

> **Romans 3:22** *Even the righteousness of God which is by faith of Jesus Christ unto all and upon all them that believe: for there is no difference:*
>
> **Romans 3:23** *For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God;*

So Romans 2 tells us that the judgment of the man who never heard will be completely fair. It does not tell us that a good conscience saves him. Every person needs the same remedy: the righteousness of God that comes by Christ.

In short: God will judge those who never heard by the light they had, not by a law they never knew, and Christ will be their judge. That makes the judgment fair. It does not make conscience a second way of salvation.

C. God Placed Every Nation to Seek Him

Preaching in Athens, Paul told the philosophers why God arranged the nations as He did:

> **Acts 17:26** *And hath made of one blood all nations of men for to dwell on all the face of the earth, and hath determined the times before appointed, and the bounds of their habitation;*
>
> **Acts 17:27** *That they should seek the Lord, if haply they might feel after him, and find him, though he be not far from every one of us:*

God set the times and places of every nation on earth with a purpose: "that they should seek the Lord, if haply they might feel after him, and find him." "Feel after" is the picture of someone groping in the dark for a door. And Paul adds the encouragement: "though he be not far from every one of us."

God promised Israel the same thing: **"And ye shall seek me, and find me, when ye shall search for me with all your heart" (Jeremiah 29:13)**. Those words were spoken to Israel in captivity, but they show God's heart toward those who seek Him.

In short: God arranged every nation's times and places so that people would seek Him, and He is not far from any of them.

D. God Sends the Message to Those Who Seek

Scripture gives real examples of what God does when someone seeks Him without yet knowing the gospel.

Cornelius. He was a Roman officer, a Gentile, who knew nothing of the gospel:

> **Acts 10:1** *There was a certain man in Caesarea called Cornelius, a centurion of the band called the Italian band,*
> **Acts 10:2** *A devout man, and one that feared God with all his house, which gave much alms to the people, and prayed to God alway.*

God saw him: **"Thy prayers and thine alms are come up for a memorial before God" (Acts 10:4)**. But God did not leave him there. He sent an angel to tell him to send for Peter, and He sent Peter a vision to make him willing to go into a Gentile's house. Why? The angel's own words, as Cornelius later reported them:

> **Acts 11:13** *And he shewed us how he had seen an angel in his house, which stood and said unto him, Send men to Joppa, and call for Simon, whose surname is Peter;*
> **Acts 11:14** *Who shall tell thee words, whereby thou and all thy house shall be saved.*

"Who shall tell thee words, whereby thou and all thy house shall be saved." Cornelius was sincere and devout, and God honoured that. But his sincerity did not save him by itself. God moved heaven and earth to bring him the message that would.

The Ethiopian. A royal official was travelling home, reading Isaiah without understanding it. God sent Philip out to a desert road for this one man (Acts 8:26-29). Philip asked, **"Understandest thou what thou readest?"** and he answered, **"How can I, except some man should guide me?" (Acts 8:30-31)**. Philip **"began at the same scripture, and preached unto him Jesus" (Acts 8:35)**.

Lydia. At Philippi, a woman **"which worshipped God, heard us: whose heart the Lord opened, that she attended unto the things which were spoken of Paul" (Acts 16:14)**.

The pattern in all three is the same. Someone was seeking God with the light he had. God saw it. And God sent a messenger with the gospel. He did not leave a sincere seeker stranded.

In short: when people seek God with the light they have, scripture shows Him sending them the gospel, even if He has to send an angel, a vision, or an evangelist down a desert road.

E. "How Shall They Hear Without a Preacher?"

Paul states God's ordinary way plainly:

> **Romans 10:13** *For whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved.*
> **Romans 10:14** *How then shall they call on him in whom they have not believed? and how shall they believe in him of whom they have not heard? and how shall they hear without a preacher?*
> **Romans 10:15** *And how shall they preach, except they be sent? as it is written, How beautiful are the feet of them that preach the gospel of peace, and bring glad tidings of good things!*

God's normal means is people sent with the message. That is why the question of the man who never heard is not only a question to wonder about. It is a call to go.

Paul then adds a striking line, quoting Psalm 19:4: **"But I say, Have they not heard? Yes verily, their sound went into all the earth, and their words unto the ends of the world" (Romans 10:18)**. Psalm 19 speaks of the witness of creation (Section A). Paul applies it to the gospel's reach, which in God's purpose is as wide as creation's own voice. He was not claiming that every person alive had already heard a preacher; he himself was still planning to go where Christ had not been named (Romans 15:20).

In short: God's ordinary way is that people hear the gospel from someone sent to tell them. The need of those who have not heard is a call to go.

F. The Gospel to Every Nation Before the End

Scripture also shows that God intends every nation to receive a witness before the end comes. Jesus said, **"And this gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in all the world for a witness unto all nations; and then shall the end come" (Matthew 24:14)**. And in the vision of the end, John saw an angel **"having the everlasting gospel to preach unto them that dwell on the earth, and to every nation, and kindred, and tongue, and people" (Revelation 14:6)**.

These verses belong to the time after the present administration, but they show God's purpose: no nation will be left without a witness before He brings history to its close.

In short: God's purpose is that every nation receive a witness before the end. He does not intend any people to be left out.

G. Is There a Second Chance After Death?

Some have hoped that those who never heard in this life will hear the gospel after death. Two passages in 1 Peter are sometimes read that way.

> **1 Peter 3:18** *For Christ also hath once suffered for sins, the just for the unjust, that he might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh, but quickened by the Spirit:*
>
> **1 Peter 3:19** *By which also he went and preached unto the spirits in prison;*
>
> **1 Peter 3:20** *Which sometime were disobedient, when once the longsuffering of God waited in the days of Noah, while the ark was a preparing, wherein few, that is, eight souls were saved by water.*

Three things in the text point elsewhere:

- **The word for "preached"** here is *kerusso*, "proclaimed" or "announced," not *euangelizo*, the usual word for preaching the gospel. Peter uses the gospel word in the next chapter, so he had it available.
- **"Spirits," with nothing added,** is the New Testament's usual word for spirit beings, not for people who have died. When scripture means people, it says so: **"the spirits of just men made perfect" (Hebrews 12:23)**.
- **Peter joins the same two things in his second letter,** sinning spirits held in prison and the days of Noah, and there he names them as angels: **"For if God spared not the angels that sinned, but cast them down to hell, and delivered them into chains of darkness, to be reserved unto judgment; And spared not the old world, but saved Noah the eighth person" (2 Peter 2:4-5)**.

So 1 Peter 3:19 most likely describes a proclamation to fallen angels, not a gospel offer to dead people.

> **1 Peter 4:5** *Who shall give account to him that is ready to judge the quick and the dead.*
> **1 Peter 4:6** *For for this cause was the gospel preached also to them that are dead, that they might be judged according to men in the flesh, but live according to God in the spirit.*

This verse does use the gospel word. But "was preached" is past: the gospel was preached to these people while they were alive, and they have since died. They were "judged according to men in the flesh" (they died, as all people do), but they "live according to God in the spirit." It describes believers who heard and believed in their lifetime.

Scripture states the order plainly: **"And as it is appointed unto men once to die, but after this the judgment" (Hebrews 9:27)**.

In short: neither passage in 1 Peter offers the gospel to people after death. Scripture places the judgment after death, not a second chance. Whatever hope there is for the man who never heard does not rest on that.

Chapter 3: The Resurrections and the Judgment

A. Two Resurrections

Scripture says that all the dead will be raised, but not all at once and not all to the same end:

> **Daniel 12:2** *And many of them that sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt.*
> **John 5:28** *Marvel not at this: for the hour is coming, in the which all that are in the graves shall hear his voice,*
> **John 5:29** *And shall come forth; they that have done good, unto the resurrection of life; and they that have done evil, unto the resurrection of damnation.*

Paul told Felix he had hope **"that there shall be a resurrection of the dead, both of the just and unjust" (Acts 24:15)**. Two resurrections: one of the just, to life, and one of the unjust, to judgment.

Until then, scripture describes the dead as asleep: "them that sleep in the dust of the earth." The man who never heard is not somewhere already receiving his reward or punishment. He is asleep, awaiting the resurrection, and his case is still to be heard.

In short: all the dead will be raised, the just to life and the unjust to judgment. Until then they sleep, and their case is still to come.

B. Who Is Raised, and When

Scripture describes the resurrections in order:

- **The believers of the Grace administration** are raised when Christ comes for His own, and the living are changed with them: **"For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first" (1 Thessalonians 4:16)**. Paul calls it **"our gathering together unto him" (2 Thessalonians 2:1)**.

- **The righteous of other ages,** Old Testament believers and those who believe during the Day of Wrath, are raised at Christ's appearing to reign. Revelation calls this the first resurrection: **"Blessed and holy is he that hath part in the first resurrection: on such the second death hath no power" (Revelation 20:6)**.
- **"The rest of the dead"** are raised after the thousand years, to stand before the great white throne: **"But the rest of the dead lived not again until the thousand years were finished" (Revelation 20:5)**.

In short: believers of this age are raised at the gathering together; the righteous of other ages at the first resurrection; and the rest of the dead after the thousand years, at the great white throne.

C. The Great White Throne

> **Revelation 20:11** *And I saw a great white throne, and him that sat on it, from whose face the earth and the heaven fled away; and there was found no place for them.*
>
> **Revelation 20:12** *And I saw the dead, small and great, stand before God; and the books were opened: and another book was opened, which is the book of life: and the dead were judged out of those things which were written in the books, according to their works.*
>
> **Revelation 20:13** *And the sea gave up the dead which were in it; and death and hell delivered up the dead which were in them: and they were judged every man according to their works.*
>
> **Revelation 20:14** *And death and hell were cast into the lake of fire. This is the second death.*
>
> **Revelation 20:15** *And whosoever was not found written in the book of life was cast into the lake of fire.*

This is where the man who never heard, if he did not believe, will stand. Read the passage slowly, because it says more than is often noticed.

The dead are judged "according to their works." God's judgment rests on what each person actually did, with the light he actually had. That fits Romans 2 exactly (Chapter 2B): no one is judged by a law he never knew.

"The books were opened: and another book was opened, which is the book of life." At this judgment the book of life is opened, and verse 15 says, "whosoever was not found written in the book of life was cast into the lake of fire." The text does not say who, at that judgment, is found written in the book. But it does open the book there, and it speaks of those "not found written" as if some might be. Scripture does not tell us more than that, and this study will not build a doctrine on what it does not say. But it is honest to notice that the book of life is opened at this judgment rather than left shut.

The Judge is Christ. "For the Father judgeth no man, but hath committed all judgment unto the Son" (John 5:22), and Paul says God will judge the secrets of men **"by Jesus Christ" (Romans 2:16)**. The man who never heard the name of Jesus will stand before Jesus Himself, the One who died for him, rose, and ascended, and who knows exactly what light that man had and what he did with it.

In short: the great white throne is a fair judgment, by works and by the light each person had, before Christ Himself. The book of life is opened there. Scripture says no more about who is found in it, but it does not shut the book.

D. A Judgment of the Living Nations

One more passage is sometimes brought into this question:

> **Matthew 25:31** *When the Son of man shall come in his glory, and all the holy angels with him, then shall he sit upon the throne of his glory:*
>
> **Matthew 25:32** *And before him shall be gathered all nations: and he shall separate them one from another, as a shepherd divideth his sheep from the goats:*
>
> **Matthew 25:40** *And the King shall answer and say unto them, Verily I say unto you, Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me.*

This is a different scene from the great white throne. Here the subjects are the living "nations," gathered before Christ when He comes in glory to reign. At the great white throne they are "the dead, small and great." And "my brethren" in Matthew's Gospel means Christ's own people (Matthew 12:48-50; 28:10). The scene is best read as a judgment of the living nations at Christ's return, by how they treated His brethren. It is not a second, works-based way of individual salvation set against faith.

In short: Matthew 25 describes the living nations judged at Christ's return, not the resurrection of the dead, and it does not offer a second way of salvation.

Chapter 4: Little Children, and Those Who Cannot Believe

There is a second group of people who never believe in Christ, not because no one told them, but because they cannot. Babies who die. Little children. People born with a mind that never develops enough to understand. What about them?

Scripture speaks to this more directly than it speaks to the man who never heard.

A. A Time Before Accountability

Scripture repeatedly marks a time before a child knows good from evil, and treats that child differently from an adult.

- When God judged the generation that refused to enter the promised land, He spared their little children: **"Moreover your little ones, which ye said should be a prey, and your children, which in that day had no knowledge between good and evil, they shall go in thither, and unto them will I give it, and they shall possess it" (Deuteronomy 1:39)**.
- Isaiah speaks of a time **"before the child shall know to refuse the evil, and choose the good" (Isaiah 7:16)**.
- God told Jonah He had compassion on Nineveh's **"more than sixscore thousand persons that cannot discern between their right hand and their left hand" (Jonah 4:11)**.
- Paul said of himself, **"For I was alive without the law once: but when the commandment came, sin revived, and I died" (Romans 7:9)**.

Scripture never gives an age. But it plainly recognises a time when a child does not yet know good from evil, and it does not hold him accountable as it holds an adult.

In short: scripture recognises a time before a child knows good from evil, and does not judge him as it judges those who know.

B. Each Answers for His Own

> **Ezekiel 18:20** *The soul that sinneth, it shall die. The son shall not bear the iniquity of the father, neither shall the father bear the iniquity of the son: the righteousness of the righteous shall be upon him, and the wickedness of the wicked shall be upon him.*

A person answers for what he himself has done. A baby who has never been able to choose, and a person whose mind never developed enough to understand, have not rejected God. The judgment at the great white throne is **"according to their works" (Revelation 20:12)**. God does not hold someone to a choice he was never able to make.

In short: every person answers for his own choices, and God does not hold anyone to a choice he was never able to make.

C. What Jesus Said About Children

Jesus spoke tenderly and plainly about children:

> **Matthew 19:14** *But Jesus said, Suffer little children, and forbid them not, to come unto me: for of such is the kingdom of heaven.*
>
> **Matthew 18:14** *Even so it is not the will of your Father which is in heaven, that one of these little ones should perish.*

These words were spoken in the Gospel period, to Israel. But they show the heart of God toward little children: "of such is the kingdom of heaven," and "it is not the will of your Father… that one of these little ones should perish."

In short: Jesus said the kingdom belongs to such as little children, and that it is not God's will that one of them perish.

D. David's Child

When David's infant son died, David stopped mourning and said:

> **2 Samuel 12:22** *And he said, While the child was yet alive, I fasted and wept: for I said, Who can tell whether GOD will be gracious to me, that the child may live?*
>
> **2 Samuel 12:23** *But now he is dead, wherefore should I fast? can I bring him back again? I shall go to him, but he shall not return to me.*

"I shall go to him, but he shall not return to me." At the least, David knew he would one day join his son in death. Many readers also hear in it a hope of seeing the child again. Either way, David was at peace about his child, and he spoke as a man who trusted God with him.

In short: David trusted God with his infant son and was at peace, knowing he would go to him.

E. The Children of a Believer

Paul wrote about a believer married to an unbeliever:

> **1 Corinthians 7:14** *For the unbelieving husband is sanctified by the wife, and the unbelieving wife is sanctified by the husband: else were your children unclean; but now are they holy.*

This verse is sometimes taken to mean that a child is saved by a believing parent's faith. It does not say that. The same verse says the unbelieving husband is "sanctified" by his wife, and two verses later Paul asks, **"For what knowest thou, O wife, whether thou shalt save thy husband?" (1 Corinthians 7:16)**. So "sanctified" here does not mean saved. It means set apart: a household with a believer in it is under God's hand in a special way, and the children are brought up near the truth, not as outsiders to it. That is a real blessing. But it is not salvation by someone else's faith.

In short: the children of a believer are set apart by being in a believing home, which is a real blessing. Paul does not say they are saved by a parent's faith.

F. Resting on God's Justice

Putting this together: scripture does not give a verse that says, in so many words, "every infant who dies is saved." But everything it does say points one way. A child before the age of knowing good from evil is not judged as one who knows. Each person answers only for his own choices. Jesus said the kingdom belongs to such as these, and that it is not the Father's will that one of them perish. And the Judge of all the earth will do right.

This study therefore holds, as a strong conclusion drawn from all these texts rather than from one verse alone, that little children and those who never had the capacity to believe are safe in the hands of a just and loving God.

In short: scripture gives strong reason for confidence that little children and those who cannot believe are safe with God. The confidence rests on His justice and on Jesus' own words.

Chapter 5: So, Does "No Access" Mean No Hope?

A. What Scripture Says Plainly

Gathering it all together, scripture states these things directly:

- **Salvation is in Christ alone.** There is no other name, no other mediator, no other way (Acts 4:12; 1 Timothy 2:5; John 14:6).
- **Everyone has some light.** Creation and God's goodness witness to Him in every land and language (Psalm 19:1-3; Romans 1:19-20; Acts 14:17).
- **The judgment will be fair.** No one is judged by a law he never had, and Christ Himself is the Judge (Romans 2:12-16; John 5:22).
- **Everyone falls short,** whatever light he had, and needs the righteousness that comes by Christ (Romans 3:22-23).
- **God arranged the nations so that people would seek Him,** and He is not far from any of them (Acts 17:26-27).
- **God sends the gospel to those who seek Him,** as He did for Cornelius, the Ethiopian and Lydia (Acts 8, 10, 16).
- **God's ordinary way is a messenger sent** (Romans 10:13-15).
- **There is no second chance after death.** After death comes the judgment (Hebrews 9:27).
- **God wills that none perish** (2 Peter 3:9; 1 Timothy 2:4).

In short: salvation is only in Christ; everyone has some light; the judgment will be fair; God seeks the seeker and sends the message; there is no second chance after death; and God wills that none perish.

B. What Scripture Does Not Say

Scripture does not spell out exactly how the man in our opening picture is judged: an adult who truly never heard the gospel in any form, all his life. It does not say he is saved by a good conscience; Romans 3 rules that out. It does not say he will hear the gospel after death; Hebrews 9:27 rules that out. And it does not say God condemns him for not believing a message he never heard; Romans 2 rules that out.

What it does say is that he will stand before Christ, be judged fairly by what he had and did, and that the book of life will be opened there (Revelation 20:12, 15).

In short: scripture does not spell out the outcome for an adult who truly never heard. It rules out salvation by conscience, a second chance after death, and condemnation for a message never heard, and it places him before a fair Judge with the book of life open.

C. How Others Have Answered

Bible believers have answered the question in three main ways:

- **Only those who hear and believe in this life are saved.** This view reads Romans 10:14 (“how shall they believe in him of whom they have not heard?”) as a rule with no exceptions.
- **God may save those who respond rightly to the light they have,** on the ground of Christ’s work, even without hearing His name. This view leans on God’s character (2 Peter 3:9) and on how He sought out Cornelius.
- **Everyone will be saved in the end.** This study rejects that view, because it contradicts the plain words of Acts 4:12 and John 14:6, and the great white throne itself, where some are not found written in the book of life (Revelation 20:15).

This study does not claim more certainty than scripture gives on the first two. It holds firmly to what scripture says, and leaves what it does not say with God.

In short: some believe only those who hear are saved; some believe God may save those who respond to the light they had; and some believe all will be saved. The last is contrary to scripture. Between the first two, this study holds to what scripture actually states.

D. Where the Hope Lies

So does “no access” mean no hope? No. The hope does not lie in a second way of salvation, or in a second chance after death, or in the goodness of the man himself. It lies in God.

- **It lies in God’s character.** He is “not willing that any should perish.” The Judge of all the earth will do right.
- **It lies in God’s seeking.** Scripture never shows God ignoring a true seeker. It shows Him sending an angel to a Roman officer, an evangelist to a desert road, and an apostle to a riverbank. He is “not far from every one of us.”
- **It lies in God’s fairness.** No one will be condemned for a message he never had the chance to hear. Each will be judged by what he had, by Christ Himself.

- **It lies in God's purpose.** He intends every nation to receive a witness before the end (Matthew 24:14; Revelation 14:6).
- **And the book of life will be open.** Scripture does not say who will be found in it at the great white throne. It does not shut it either.

In short: "no access" does not mean no hope. The hope is not in man, or in a second way, or in a second chance. It is in God: His character, His seeking, His fairness, His purpose, and His book of life.

E. What It Means for Us

For a believer, the question of those who have never heard is not finally a puzzle to solve. It is a call. Paul's questions were not only about how people come to faith; they were about who will go:

> **Romans 10:14** *How then shall they call on him in whom they have not believed? and how shall they believe in him of whom they have not heard? and how shall they hear without a preacher?*
>
> **Romans 10:15** *And how shall they preach, except they be sent? as it is written, How beautiful are the feet of them that preach the gospel of peace, and bring glad tidings of good things!*

God's ordinary way of reaching the man who never heard is a believer who goes and tells him. Every believer is given **"the ministry of reconciliation" (2 Corinthians 5:18)**, and **"Now then we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God did beseech you by us: we pray you in Christ's stead, be ye reconciled to God" (2 Corinthians 5:20)**. Before Christ ascended He told His disciples, **"ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judaea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth" (Acts 1:8)**.

The best answer to "What about those who never heard?" is to make sure fewer people never hear.

In short: the question of those who never heard is a call to every believer: go, tell, pray, and give, so that the message God wants every person to hear reaches them.

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Sources Consulted

Scripture. The King James Version (1769 text) is the text used throughout. Every quotation was checked word for word against it.

Language references. *Strong's Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible* (G2784 *kerusso*, G2097 *euangelizo*, G4151 *pneuma*); Thayer's *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*. Word meanings and occurrences were confirmed with standard online reference tools (Blue Letter Bible, BibleHub).

Companion studies in this library. *Salvation in the Grace Administration* (how a person is saved today); *The Seven Administrations of Scripture* (the administrations in Chapter 1); *Where Are the Dead Right Now?* (the sleep of the dead and the order of the resurrections, Chapter 3).

Outside works were used for their language and background facts. Every conclusion in this study was tested directly against the text of scripture itself.

Scripture Index

References are listed in the order of the books of the Bible. “Anchor” is the Anchor Passage; “Intro” with a letter is a section of the Introduction; a number with a letter is a chapter and its section (for example, 2D is Chapter 2, section D); a number alone is the opening of that chapter.

Genesis
Genesis 2:16-17 — 1B
Genesis 15:6 — 1A, 1B
Genesis 18:25 — Anchor, Intro B

Deuteronomy
Deuteronomy 1:39 — 4A

2 Samuel
2 Samuel 12:22-23 — 4D

Psalms
Psalm 19:1-3 — 2A, 5A
Psalm 19:4 — 2E

Isaiah
Isaiah 7:16 — 4A

Jeremiah
Jeremiah 29:13 — 2C

Ezekiel
Ezekiel 18:20 — 4B

Daniel
Daniel 12:2 — 3A

Jonah
Jonah 4:11 — 4A

Habakkuk
Habakkuk 2:4 — 1B

Matthew
Matthew 12:48-50 — 3D
Matthew 18:14 — 4C
Matthew 19:14 — 4C
Matthew 24:14 — 2F, 5D
Matthew 25:31-32 — 3D
Matthew 25:40 — 3D
Matthew 28:10 — 3D

John
John 5:22 — 3C, 5A
John 5:28-29 — 3A
John 6:29 — 1B
John 14:6 — Intro B, 1C, 5A, 5C

Acts
Acts 1:8 — 5E
Acts 2:33 — 1B
Acts 4:7 — 1C
Acts 4:12 — Anchor, Intro A, Intro B, 1C, 5A, 5C
Acts 8:26-29 — 2D
Acts 8:30-31 — 2D
Acts 8:35 — 2D
Acts 10:1-2 — 2D
Acts 10:4 — 2D
Acts 11:13-14 — 2D
Acts 14:17 — 2A, 5A
Acts 16:14 — 2D
Acts 17:26-27 — 2C, 5A
Acts 24:15 — 3A

Romans
Romans 1:19-20 — 2A, 5A
Romans 2:12-16 — 2B, 5A
Romans 2:16 — 2B, 3C
Romans 3:22-23 — 2B, 5A
Romans 7:9 — 4A
Romans 10:9 — 1B
Romans 10:13-15 — 2E, 5A
Romans 10:14 — 5C
Romans 10:14-15 — 5E
Romans 10:18 — 2E
Romans 15:20 — 2E

1 Corinthians
1 Corinthians 7:14 — 4E
1 Corinthians 7:16 — 4E
1 Corinthians 15:3-4 — 1B

2 Corinthians
2 Corinthians 5:18 — 5E
2 Corinthians 5:20 — 5E

1 Thessalonians
1 Thessalonians 4:16 — 3B

2 Thessalonians
2 Thessalonians 2:1 — 3B

1 Timothy
1 Timothy 2:4 — Intro B, 5A
1 Timothy 2:5 — Intro B, 1C, 5A

Hebrews
Hebrews 9:27 — 2G, 5A, 5B
Hebrews 11:4-7 — 1A
Hebrews 11:6 — 1A
Hebrews 12:23 — 2G

1 Peter
1 Peter 3:18-20 — 2G
1 Peter 3:19 — 2G
1 Peter 4:5-6 — 2G

2 Peter
2 Peter 2:4-5 — 2G
2 Peter 3:9 — Anchor, Intro B, 5A, 5C

Revelation
Revelation 14:6 — 2F, 5D
Revelation 20:5 — 3B
Revelation 20:6 — 3B
Revelation 20:11-15 — 3C
Revelation 20:12 — 4B, 5B
Revelation 20:15 — 5B, 5C