



When Babies Die

Do they really go to Heaven?

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AN ACTUAL LETTER

Dear Pastor:

...*It was a little boy!* ... As soon as the excitement came, the tension of the room mounted. He didn't seem to be breathing. I thought this might be a normal part of the birth process—it was all new to us. The atmosphere in the room quickly became so heavy. I saw the doctor pick up our baby's arms, expecting some reaction but they fell to the table lifeless. The room was quiet except for the sounds of the doctors and nurses attempting to save my son's life ... another doctor rushed into the room, and then our doctor took me to the hall. He said that everything was being done to save the baby but that "hope was dimming." I clung to the hope that our baby would be the exception ... Our little boy struggled on until the third day then rested in God's arms. We try not to question God, but need one question answered desperately. **Where does it say in Scripture that babies go to Heaven when they die?** Is it true that we really get to see him again in Heaven?

- A Hurting Father



A. The Purpose of this Material

The purpose of this document is NOT to express condolences, though please know that if this topic is of interest, chances are you are weathering the profoundly heartbreaking death of an infant or young child. *My deepest, heartfelt sympathy to you.* It is NOT the purpose of this document to deliberate your many feelings, coach you in grief management, or help with the countless other questions that you may seek answers to. *You have the toughest days ahead and I will do anything I can do to help you find purpose in your pain.* **It is the purpose of this document to defend, from Scripture, the position that all young children and those who die in the womb do go to Heaven—because they are saved by God's grace.** It is also my purpose to include all mentally handicapped persons whose intellectual and moral capacity cannot surpass that of a child and thus are also saved by God's grace.

We place our faith in Christ, and trust Him to be faithful to His Word. We claim the promises of Scriptures and the assurances of the grace of our Lord. We know that heaven will be filled with those who never grew to maturity on earth, but in heaven will greet us completed in Christ. Let us resolve by grace to meet them there."

- Drs. Al Mohler and Daniel Akin ¹

¹ Drs. Albert Mohler, Jr. and Daniel L. Akin, "The Salvation of the 'Little Ones'" *Do Infants Who Die Go to Heaven?*, SBC Life, May 1998, p. 12.

B. Common but unsatisfactory reasons for hope

Again, there is biblical ground for hope but most people don't start there. They look for hope in places that in time will prove disappointing. Let's survey these views:

1. Sentimentality	"Of course our baby is in heaven, how could God refuse a precious baby?" The reality is we have no right to establish doctrine based on what we "hope" may be true.
2. Universality	This is the belief that <i>all</i> people go to heaven regardless of sin or salvation—this would include infants. Again, it is not in keeping with Holy Scripture. It is simple, biblical heresy to believe that "all" are saved "just because".
3. Pelagianism	This is the belief that children are not born with a corrupt nature (i.e., original sin) and therefore not "condemned". However, the claim of human sinlessness is clearly and strongly denied throughout the Bible. (cf. Eccl. 7:20, Romans 3.23, and 1 John 1.8)
4. Post-mortem, soteriological hypothesis	This "theory" falsely assumes that because infants cannot "pray to receive Jesus as Lord" they can only be saved somehow in eternity—after death. (e.g. during the millennial reign of Christ on the earth, in "prayers for the dead", in purgatory, or some other "official church sacrament", etc., depending of the belief system.) It is thought that some babies will and some will not receive Christ during this time so "we cannot know for sure." Again, this is all conjecture without ANY scriptural support.
5. Infant Baptism	This process, specifically in conjunction with the doctrine of <i>baptismal regeneration</i> concludes that anyone (including infants) who is baptized automatically goes to heaven. In light of all scripture, there is only one necessary condition of salvation and that is through faith in Jesus Christ.

C. Who gets to go to heaven among "the young"?

A biblical understanding of the words, "embryo", "infant", "baby", and "young child", etc.

This is very important and will comfort you. You may know that the Old Testament was written in Biblical Hebrew and the New Testament was written in Koiné Greek. These languages are complex and differ in many ways from our English. The important precept I want to communicate is this:

- In Hebrew, the one word (עוֹלָל) pronounced "Ah-LEL" translates to all the words, "child", "embryo" (in a womb), "infant" (outside the womb), and "baby". Translation is always based on context.
- In Greek, the one word (βρέφος) pronounced "bree-PHOS" translates to all the words, "child", "embryo" (in a womb), "infant" (outside the womb), and "baby". Translation is always based on context.

For those of us who believe the Bible to be God's infallible word to man, we should know that in God's eyes, there is no difference between an embryo, a "fetus", an infant, or a baby *except location*. As far as importance and value, all are precious to God and as we will see, are under grace. This certainly includes all babies that die regardless of the mode of death (ie., those children aborted, miscarriages, those stillborn, infants, babies—even young children are included.) It includes "dramatic, high profile deaths" (seen on TV, kidnapping/murders, etc.), abortions, or natural deaths. Grace will abound!

D. Why do “they”* get to go to heaven?

* “They” are all embryos, fetuses, miscarriages, infants, babies (and the mentally challenged) hereon in this section referred to as “babies.” Cf. Section C on page 2.

1. Babies are “innocent” as they are incapable of good or evil acts.

Deuteronomy 1:39, NLT - ³⁹ *I will give the land to your little ones—your innocent children. You were afraid they would be captured, but they will be the ones who occupy it.*

Deuteronomy 1:39, NIV - ³⁹ *And the little ones that you said would be taken captive, your children who do not yet know good from bad—they will enter the land. I will give it to them and they will take possession of it.*

Jeremiah 19:4, NIV - ⁴ *For they have forsaken me and made this a place of foreign gods; they have burned sacrifices in it to gods that neither they nor their fathers nor the kings of Judah ever knew, and they have filled this place with the blood of the innocent.*

Scripture states that babies—by their very nature—do not know “good” from “evil”. They are not moral agents. They are innocent—they do not sin.

2. God’s judgment is administered only on the basis of sins committed in the flesh—babies are exempt on biblical grounds (cf. above).

2 Corinthians 5:10, NIV - ¹⁰ *For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive what is due him for the things done while in the body, whether good or bad.*

Paul provide a list of people who will not enter heaven:

1 Corinthians 6:9-10, NIV - ⁹ *Do you not know that the wicked will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: Neither the sexually immoral nor idolaters nor adulterers nor male prostitutes nor homosexual offenders ¹⁰ nor thieves nor the greedy nor drunkards nor slanderers nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God.*

Revelation 20:12-13, NLT - ¹² *I saw the dead, both great and small, standing before God’s throne. And the books were opened, including the Book of Life. And the dead were judged according to what they had done, as recorded in the books. ¹³ *The sea gave up its dead, and death and the grave gave up their dead. And all were judged according to their deeds.**

3. The Bible speaks specifically of babies and heaven.

2 Samuel 12:19-23, NLT - ¹⁹ *When David saw them whispering, he realized what had happened. “Is the child dead?” he asked. “Yes,” they replied, “he is dead.” ²⁰ Then David got up from the ground, washed himself, put on lotions, and changed his clothes. He went to the Tabernacle and worshiped the Lord. After that, he returned to the palace and was served food and ate. ²¹ His advisers were amazed. “We don’t understand you,” they told him. “While the child was still living, you wept and refused to eat. But now that the child is dead, you have stopped your mourning and are eating again.” ²² David replied, “I fasted and wept while the child was alive, for I said, ‘Perhaps the Lord will be gracious to me and let the child live.’ ²³ But why should I fast when he is dead? Can I bring him back again? I will go to him one day, but he cannot return to me.”*

Matthew 18:14, HCSB - ¹⁴ *In the same way, it is not the will of your Father in heaven that one of these little ones perish.*

Matthew 19:13-15, NLT - ¹³ *One day some parents brought their children to Jesus so he could lay his hands on them and pray for them. But the disciples scolded the parents for bothering him. ¹⁴ But Jesus said, “Let the children come to me. Don’t stop them! For the Kingdom of Heaven belongs [the Greek uses a word that means “belongs ... as a possession”] to those who are like these children.” ¹⁵ And he placed his hands on their heads and blessed them before he left.*

John 10:27-29, NASB95 - ²⁸ *... I give eternal life to them, and they will never perish; and no one will snatch them out of My hand. ²⁹ “My Father, who has given them to Me, is greater than all; and no one is able to snatch them out of the Father’s hand.*

E. Quotes

I hope you are both well reconciled to the death of your child. I cannot be sorry for the death of infants. How many storms do they escape! Nor can I doubt, in my private judgment that they are included in the election of grace.

- John Newton, Minister, Writer of our hymn, *Amazing Grace* ²

Now let every mother and father here present know assuredly that it is well with the child, if God hath taken it away from you in its infant days. ... Many of you are parents who have children in heaven. It is not a desirable thing that you should go there, too? ... Mother, unconverted mother, from the battlements of heaven your child beckons you to Paradise. Father, ungodly, impenitent father, the little eyes that once looked joyously on you, look down upon you now, and the lips which had scarcely learned to call you father, ere they were sealed by the silence of death, may be heard as with a still small voice, saying to you this morning, 'Father, must we be forever divided by the great gulf which no man can pass over?' Doth not nature itself put a sort of longing in your soul that you may be bound in the bundle of life with your own children?"

- Charles H. Spurgeon, Pastor, Metropolitan Tabernacle in London ³

If a deceased infant were sent to hell on no other account than that of original sin, there would be a good reason to the divine mind for the judgment, but the child's mind would be a perfect blank as to the reason of its suffering. Under such circumstances, it would know suffering, but it would have no understanding of the reason for its suffering. It could not tell its neighbor—it could not tell itself—why it was so awfully smitten; and consequently the whole meaning and significance of its sufferings, being to it a conscious enigma, the very essence of penalty would be absent, and justice would be disappointed of its vindication ⁴ ... all infants dying in infancy are and must be [saved] ... the death of an infant therefore, is the irrefutable proof of its salvation. ⁵

- Dr. R. A. Webb, Presbyterian Theologian and Itinerant Lecturer

When we look into the grave of one of these little ones, we do not place our hope and trust in the false promises of an unbiblical theology, in the instability of sentimentalism, in the cold analysis of human logic, nor in the cowardly refuge of ambiguity. We place our faith in Christ, and trust Him to be faithful to His Word. We claim the promises of Scriptures and the assurances of the grace of our Lord. We know that heaven will be filled with those who never grew to maturity on earth, but in heaven will greet us completed in Christ. Let us resolve by grace to meet them there.

- Drs. Al Mohler and Daniel Akin, The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary ⁶



² John Newton, "Letter IX", *The Works of John Newton*, (London, 1820), p. 182.

³ Charles H. Spurgeon, "Infant Salvation", a sermon preached September 29, 1861 in London, England. (Cf. Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit, circa 1861. p. 505.)

⁴ R. A. Webb, *The Theology of Infant Salvation*, (Richmond, VA: Presbyterian Committee of Publications, 1907), p. 42.

⁵ *Ibid*, p. 188-189.

⁶ Drs. Albert Mohler, Jr. and Daniel L. Akin, "The Salvation of the 'Little Ones'" *Do Infants Who die Go to Heaven?*, SBC Life, May 1998, p. 12.

The righteous perish, and no one understands it in his heart, ... they are taken away and no one understands that the righteous are taken away to be spared from evil ... they enter into peace; they find rest as they lie in death.

- Isaiah 57:1-2 (NIV)

F. “Q and A” on This Subject

Question	Pastor Joe’s Response
How old will a baby be in Heaven?	Scripture does not say. I recently read a doctoral dissertation on this subject. The doctoral candidate proposed a theory that in Heaven we will all be 33 years—like Jesus at His death. The Bible is clear that in Heaven, we will be “complete”. I can’t imagine this meaning that if one dies in the womb or as an infant, they would remain in that state.
What is the “age of accountability” for a child?	Again, scripture does not set a specific age when children “know good from evil” in a true, theological sense. Many put the age in and around eight years of age (i.e., James Dobson, Billy Graham). I put it higher, around age 10 to 12 years of age. I just feel that God’s grace abounds! But I do believe a child much younger than this can receive Christ as Savior.
Will the baby and the parents know each other in Heaven?	The Bible teaches that in Heaven “all things are known”. I do believe that you will know your child and your child will know you. <i>I am very confident of this!</i>
What about the parental relationship?	The Bible teaches that there will be no marriage relationship in Heaven, so I doubt we will have the official relationship of “parent and child” in Heaven. I do have this “holy hunch” that each of us will be <i>very much aware</i> of what our relationships were on earth.
If a saved, pregnant woman dies, will she be pregnant for all eternity?	No, as my wife says, <i>“That would be hell!”</i> (ha, ha!)
Will God answer my question, “why did my baby die” when I get to heaven?	Again, I do believe that in Heaven, all things are known. There will certainly be “more light in Heaven” than here on earth. Regarding your “why” question, when you get to Heaven and have that baby back in your arms, your “why” questions won’t matter then! Praise the Lord!
What about a funeral service?	Though laws vary from state to state, I do believe that some ceremony (private or public) is valuable. Whether it is a funeral (with a casket) or a memorial service (without a casket), a ceremony proclaims the Christian hope that the baby taken from your arms was <i>never</i> taken from God’s arms. The service will be a public declaration that one day, lives separated on earth will <i>forever</i> be united in Heaven. Death is <i>not permanent</i> for <u>any</u> believer or <u>any</u> child— <i>praise the Lord!</i>
Do you have any good books you would recommend on this subject for further reading?	Yes, there are two books. Both are very thorough and detailed. One is <i>“Safe in the Arms of Jesus”</i> by Dr. John MacArthur and the other is <i>“When a Baby Dies”</i> by Ronald Nash. Both books speak to the theological understanding of why we believe that babies go to Heaven when they die. Both give answers to comfort grieving parents.