

Do All Infants Go to Heaven?

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Editors' note:

This essay has been adapted and shortened from [Tough Topics: Biblical Answers to 25 Challenging Questions](#) (Crossway, 2013).

Recent revelatory videos about the practices of Planned Parenthood have stirred many to ask about the eternal destiny of these precious unborn babies. So are those who die in infancy lost? The same question applies to those who live beyond infancy but, because of mental disability or some other handicap, are incapable of moral discernment, deliberation, or volition.

This is more than a theoretical issue designed for speculation. It touches one of the most emotionally and spiritually unsettling experiences in all of life: the loss of a young child.

The view I embrace is that *all* those who die in infancy, as well as those so mentally incapacitated they're incapable of making an informed choice, are among the elect of God, chosen for salvation before the world began. The evidence for this view is scant, but significant.

1. In Romans 1:20 Paul describes recipients of general revelation as being “without excuse.” They can't blame their unbelief on a lack of evidence. There is sufficient revelation of God's existence in the natural order to establish the moral accountability of all who witness it. Might this imply that those who are *not* recipients of general revelation (i.e., infants) are therefore *not* accountable to God or subject to wrath? In other words, wouldn't those who die in infancy have an “excuse” in that they neither receive general revelation nor have the capacity to respond to it?

2. There are texts that assert or imply that infants don't know good or evil and hence lack the capacity to make morally informed—and thus responsible—choices. According to Deuteronomy 1:39 they are said to “have no knowledge of good or evil.” This in itself, however, doesn't prove infant salvation, for they may still be held liable for the sin of Adam.

3. We must take account of the story of David's son in [2 Samuel 12:15–23](#) (especially verse 23). The firstborn child of David and Bathsheba is struck by the Lord and dies. In the seven days before his death, David fasts and prays, hoping that “the Lord may be gracious to me, that the child may live.” Yet following the child's death, David washes, eats, and worships. Asked why he's responding this way, David says, “Since he has died, why should I fast? Can I bring him back again? I shall go to him, but he will not return to me” (v. 23).

What does it mean when David says “I shall go to him”? If this is merely a reference to the grave or death in the sense that David, too, shall one day die and be buried, one wonders why he’d say something so patently obvious. Also, it appears that David draws some measure of comfort from knowing that he will “go to him.” It’s the reason why David resumes the normal routine of life. It appears to be the reason he ceases from the display of grief. It appears to be a truth from which he derives comfort and encouragement. How could any of this be true if David will simply die like his son? It would, therefore, appear David believed he would be reunited with his deceased infant. Does this imply that at least this one particular infant was saved? Perhaps. But if so, are we justified in constructing a doctrine in which we affirm the salvation of *all* who die in infancy?

4. There is the consistent testimony of Scripture that people are judged on the basis of sins committed voluntarily and consciously in the body (see 2 Cor. 5:10; [1 Cor. 6:9–10](#); [Rev. 20:11–12](#)). In other words, eternal judgment is always based on conscious rejection of divine revelation (whether in creation, conscience, or Christ) and willful disobedience. Are infants capable of either? There is no explicit account in Scripture of any other judgment based on any other grounds. Thus, those dying in infancy are saved because they do not (indeed cannot) satisfy the conditions for divine judgment.

5. Related to the above point, is what [R. A. Webb states](#):

[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. Such an infant could feel that it was in hell, but it could not explain, to its own conscience, why it was there.

6. We have what would appear to be clear biblical evidence that at least *some* infants are regenerate in the womb, such that if they died in their infancy they would be saved. This provides at least a theoretical basis for considering whether the same may be true of all who die in infancy. As Ronald Nash [points out](#), “If this sort of thing happens even once, it can certainly happen in other cases.” Supporting texts include [Jeremiah 1:5](#) and Luke 1:15.

7. Some have appealed to [Matthew 19:13–15](#) (also [Mark 10:13–16](#); [Luke 18:15–17](#)) where Jesus declares, “Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of heaven belongs to such as these.” Is he simply saying if one wishes to be saved one must be as trusting as a child (i.e., devoid of skepticism and arrogance)? In other words, is Jesus merely describing the *kind* of people who enter the kingdom? Or is he saying these very children were recipients of saving grace? If the latter were

true, it would seem to imply Jesus knew that the children he was then receiving would all die in infancy. Is that credible?

8. Let me close with an argument that's entirely subjective (and therefore of questionable evidential value). Given our understanding of God's character as presented in Scripture, does he appear as the kind of God who would eternally condemn infants on no other ground than that of Adam's transgression? Again, this is a subjective (and perhaps sentimental) question. But it deserves an answer, nonetheless.

I can only speak for myself, but I find the first, third, fourth, fifth, and eighth points sufficiently convincing. Therefore, I do believe in the salvation of those dying in infancy. I affirm their salvation, though, neither because they are innocent nor because they have merited forgiveness, but solely because God has sovereignly chosen them for eternal life, regenerated their souls, and applied the saving benefits of the blood of Christ to them apart from conscious faith.

Sam Storms (ThM, Dallas Theological Seminary; PhD, The University of Texas) is lead pastor for preaching and vision at [Bridgeway Church](#) in Oklahoma City, Oklahoma, founder of [Enjoying God Ministries](#), and a Council member of The Gospel Coalition. He has authored numerous books, including [Practicing the Power](#). He and his wife, Ann, have two children.

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