

## **What Happens To Babies When They Die?**

What happens to babies when they die? Or to young children? What happens to adults born with the mind of a child, or those who from birth had severe brain damage or defects when they die? Perhaps no question cuts quite to the centre of all of our lives. I don't think there is a person alive today, whose life has not been directly affected by the death of a child, or a young relative, or the miscarriage of a friend. How deep is the grief and sorrow borne by countless parents over children taken from them before, during or after pregnancy. Often that grief is accompanied with anger, depression and even a sense of guilt. But above all, there is the anxiety - where are they now?

This is obviously not a topic to be dealt with lightly or casually. It's something that many carry around as the burden of their hearts.

It's quite true that the Bible does not have a chapter on 'where babies go when they die'. However, there is enough implicit and explicit verses to teach us confidently what Scripture says about these things.

Well, let's lay a foundation. Firstly, it's obvious that a huge amount of the human population dies in the state we're looking at. Infant mortality has always been high, historically. As AIDS takes its toll in Africa, that rate is increasing. A booklet I read on abortion printed in the early nineties stated that by then, the amount of unborn killed in the 20<sup>th</sup> century exceeded the dead in all of the 20<sup>th</sup> century wars put together by a huge amount.

What you are basically left with, is the conclusion that these billions of souls are either populating hell at an incredible rate, populating heaven at an incredible rate, or being split between the two destinations. It seems to me that this is not something that God is going to say nothing about.

Our first stop is to ask how does God view babies and infants? Are they considered by God to be morally innocent? To be sinless?

### **1) Babies inherit a sinful nature.**

Romans 5:12

This is one of the most important verse in the Bible for teaching that the whole human race is infected by Adam's sin. When Adam sinned – the whole human race to be born sinned in Adam. How?

- 1) The representative view
- 2) The seminal view.

Either way, the Bible teaches us that when Adam sinned, he did what we would have done, what every human would have done. Every human being conceived is as guilty as Adam and Eve.

One of the ways we know this is because babies die. The wages of sin is what? Death. So if babies are without any sin, without any guilt, why do they die. To say because they are human is to deny what God said. The human race was not meant to die. Each human would have lived eternally had Adam and Eve not sinned.

David knew this when he wrote in Psalm 51:5 “Behold, I was shapen in iniquity; and in sin did my mother conceive me”

If you doubt this, then ask yourself why Jesus had to be born of a virgin. One reason was obviously so He would be Son of God and Son of man, but another was so that being the seed of woman (Genesis 3:15), He would not inherit a sinful nature, which some see theologically, as passing through the ‘seed of Adam’. So from birth, Christ was holy and sinless by nature.

Consider also that it is not long before we see that children indeed have a nature inclined towards sin. They do not have to be taught how to lie, disobey, be selfish, be violent. So there is a sinful nature in babies.

So then that leads us to the next question – where do they go? It would seem, if that was all the information the Bible gave us, that we would say babies go to hell. But we find something different as we search the Scriptures.

## **2) It seems the Bible points out that babies and infants go to heaven when they die**

2 Samuel 12. David is confronted by Nathan over his sin with Bathsheba. He is told his child by Bathsheba will die. David begins to pray and fast, begging God to spare the child to the point where his servants are extremely worried about him. Well, the child does die. The servants are afraid to break the news to him, but their whispering gives them away, and David asks them and they tell him- the child is dead. Well, David gets up, and basically cleans himself, eats and freshens up. The servants are confused, expecting his state to have gone from bad to worse. Here is David’s explanation (2 Sam 12:22-23) “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? <sup>23</sup>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.” Fascinating. David says – I’m can’t bring him back, but I am going to see him. And in light of this, he is comforted.

Some say, well David just meant he would join him in death. Why then did David seem at peace and comforted? Would you get comforted at the thought that you will also die and be buried near your child? Hardly. No, it seems David was expecting to see this child in heaven. Remember, David himself expected to go to heaven when he died - Ps 23: 6 “Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life: and I will dwell in the house of the LORD for ever.” If you doubt that David expected to see this child in heaven, ask yourself why he was inconsolable when his rebellious son Absalom was killed as an adult. More than likely, because David realized this child of his was not a believer and had ended up in a place of torment for eternity.

Job 3:11;13: "Why died I not from the womb?.. For now should I have lain still and been quiet, I should have slept: then had I been at rest," Job is cursing the day he was born, and says, if I were like the unborn – I would now be at rest. Interesting. Job describes the state of one who died in the womb the same way NT believers who have died are described –at rest. If Job thought they were in hell, this would hardly be appropriate. Ecclesiastes 6:5 "Moreover he hath not seen the sun, nor known *any thing*: this hath more rest than the other". Solomon is likewise declaring the futility of life, and says similar words to Job's – the unborn have much rest.

Revelation, chapter 5:9-10 "In heaven there were people praising Christ from every tongue and tribe and people and nation." Do you know there are tribes and nations that have never heard the gospel, but there will still be representatives from those tribes and nations in heaven praising Christ. How? Because some of them died in their infancy or childhood or without the ability to understand. The adults in those tribes had reached an age of moral understanding, where they were guilty of Romans 1:21. But the infants were innocent of this. Very possibly, the amount who die this way may mean that heaven will be far more populated than hell, to the triumph of God's grace and mercy over judgement.

Then little children were brought to Him that He might put *His* hands on them and pray, but the disciples rebuked them. But Jesus said, "Let the little children come to Me, and do not forbid them; for of such is the kingdom of heaven." And He laid *His* hands on them and departed from there.  
(Mat 19:13-15)

"Even so it is not the will of your Father who is in heaven that one of these little ones should perish.  
(Mat 18:14)

It seems from Scripture that babies and infants that die go to heaven. Since every reference to a child dying or being stillborn refers to their state being better, or good, we can only conclude that all babies and infants that die go straight into the presence of God. Obviously they do not appear there as babies, they appear as perfected people, as they would have been at their best and better here on earth.

So now we either have a contradiction in the Bible or we must find an explanation. We are told all humans inherit a sinful nature and are therefore guilty before God and worthy of judgement. Ephesians 2:3 calls us the children of wrath by nature. Vut then we find all children dying going to heaven. What happens in between? How is this possible?

The answer lies in something we might call moral responsibility. God knows when a human has come to a point of understanding good and evil, and therefore is able to accept or reject the truth.

### **3) This is because God regards such babies and infants as innocent of rejecting the light of His truth**

'Moreover your little ones and your children, who you say will be victims, who today have no knowledge of good and evil, they shall go in there; to them I will give it, and they shall possess it.

(Deu 1:39)

Notice the words He uses to describe the children “which in that day had no knowledge between good and evil”. He is not saying they are sinless. He is saying they were not accountable for the actions of rebellious Israel. They didn’t understand it all. They were not rebels, as they had not come to the age of understanding. God says “These ones will enter the land”

'The carcasses of you who have complained against Me shall fall in this wilderness, all of you who were numbered, according to your entire number, from twenty years old and above.

(Num 14:29)

There are other verses which indicate God knows before a certain age children are not morally culpable.

For before the child shall know to refuse the evil, and choose the good, the land that thou abhorrest shall be forsaken of both her kings.

(Isa 7:16)

And should not I spare Nineveh, that great city, wherein are more than sixscore thousand persons that cannot discern between their right hand and their left hand; and *also* much cattle?

(Jon 4:11)

In other words, God knows there is a time when every human comes to understand the light. That is, they know what the heathen man in jungle knows – this world was made by someone far greater than I, and I owe my life to him. And He must be pure and holy and good because I have a conscience telling me I should not do evil, but should do right. Every human who knows that much, the Bible says is without excuse. On that much light, Acts 17 says every man could feel after God in hopes of finding Him.

It can differ from child to child, some come to this knowledge earlier, some later. But there is appoint, and only God knows when it is, when they now know good from evil, and have become morally culpable before God.

See, babies need saving from their sin. We’ve established that. It’s not that they don’t. How does He save them? Same as us – through the perfect sacrifice of Christ. The only difference is He lets us come to that age of accountability and then gives us the opportunity to repent and humbly receive His grace. The point is, God does it for them,

without the aspect of the human responsibility of repentance and faith that is applicable to people who are no longer 'innocent' they way they are. .

We know that no child or infant or unborn baby dies by accident. Therefore it is God's will that they die. And it seems that God sovereignly applies the death of Jesus Christ to every human whom He chooses to allow to die before that age of understanding. You could see it as a form of election. God chooses to save millions upon millions of humans by not allowing them to live long enough to reject Him, and so applies Christ's death to them. Read Psalm 139 and you will see how much God loves the infant in the womb. He knits him or her. God also has a desire for people to be saved. He does not have a desire for people to perish according to 2 Peter 3:9. Listen to Him plead with Israel: "*As I live, saith the Lord GOD, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked; but that the wicked turn from his way and live: turn ye, turn ye from your evil ways; for why will ye die, O house of Israel*" (Ez 33:11). The point is, God loves mankind. God is also completely in control of life and death. No life or death is out of the hands of God.

Eph 2:8 – says we are saved **by** grace **through** faith. The payment for our salvation was purchased by Christ on the cross, not by us with our decision. Faith doesn't save, grace does – grace is received through faith. And if God has **paid** for their salvation, is it not His prerogative to spend it on whoever He wants?

For one who is at that age or condition to understand the Gospel – grace is received through faith. For these innocents, it seems grace is applied to them without faith.

So this shows the futility of having babies baptized in hopes of getting their sins paid for, or doing all kinds of other works. Only grace can save a human, not works.

Also, Scripture is clear that children will not be punished for the sins of their parents, but the flip side is that children will not supposedly inherit the righteousness of their parents either. An unborn child of a Hitler is as innocent as an unborn child of an apostle Peter, yet both are sinners by nature and require God's sovereign grace. You cannot inherit salvation, you can only inherit a sinful nature.

Does this mean a child is automatically saved? No. We are not saying that all babies are automatically regenerated and children of God, because that would mean the whole human race would go to heaven. If God allows a human to live to the age of understanding, it is clear he has not done this special act of regeneration for them, otherwise they would have died and would have been in heaven. Instead, God now expects people who live to that age to make the decision to repent and believe, or to reject Christ's authority.

So let me touch briefly on the topic of the salvation of children. Can children understand the Gospel? Jesus made that clear when He said, "'Assuredly, I say to you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God as a little child will by no means enter it.'" (Mar 10:15)

Children can understand the Gospel. You do not have to wait to the age of 13 or 21 to evangelise your children. From a very young age, they can understand God, sin, their accountability to God, the depravity of their own hearts, the uselessness of their own righteousness, the need for Christ's righteousness. They can understand punishment for sin – particularly if you have been doing your job as a parent and disciplining them.

1) Don't oversimplify the Gospel. Don't say things like "Just ask Jesus into your heart" or "tell Jesus you love Him today". Rather keep explaining and restating the Gospel.

Repetition is important. Don't be afraid to speak about punishment for sin as if it might give children nightmares. If there is any nightmare a human needs – it is that of hell.

Children can understand punishment, just like they can understand God loves them immensely and desires their salvation.

2) Don't take the first positive response you see as a sign of salvation. Children are eager to please, and that is good, but keep on explaining the Gospel to them. When they state their desire to be saved, ask them why they want to be saved. An answer like "because Johnny did it last week" or 'so that we can all live together forever in heaven' may not have all the pieces in place. If a child does seem to pray a prayer of trusting Christ, then do not tell them "You are saved!" Rather tell them, if you have truly trusted Christ and meant it in your heart, God promise you eternal life.

3) Use the actual Word of God. It is always faith which comes by hearing and hearing by the Word of God for adults and for children. Let them actually read or hear the very words of God to them. They are very able to understand repentance and faith.

4) Pray for their salvation in private and in front of them.

5) Don't let your children be baptised or partake of the lord's Supper until they have shown a fairly clear understanding of salvation, and are showing some of the fruits – particularly a more obedient heart.

I had a cousin who was born with profound brain damage. He lived to around 23, but could never speak, or really live without the supervision you would give a baby. I fully expect to see Darryl in heaven, covered by God's grace, a perfectly Christlike saint, set apart for God by His sovereign grace. The day he died I believe he awoke to an understanding he'd never had, to the goodness of his Creator's face. He'll praise God forever, for redeeming him, even when he was a sinner, with literally, no hope at all.