

# What Happens to Infants Who Die

Terry Leigh Perrine

**Abstract:** This paper demonstrates that despite the Bible's lack of direct teaching on the outcome of infant mortality, studying the Scriptures can provide the answer that loved ones so desperately seek when an infant dies; that is, all infants who die go to heaven. This paper defends this position and provides Christians with the knowledge to be able to answer this question confidently. To accomplish this purpose, this paper addresses a series of topics in anthropology, hamartiology, soteriology, theology proper, and personal eschatology in a manner that builds one biblical truth upon the next as the research progresses. The paper addresses some erroneous beliefs about infant salvation and reviews specific biblical examples demonstrating throughout history God's dealings with and regard for children, including 2 Samuel 12:23.

Key Words: Infants, salvation, elect, original sin, regeneration, accountability

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Over the course of one's ministry and life, it is likely that one might be asked the sensitive and challenging question, "What happens to infants who die?" Whether this question comes through a personal relationship or in the course of one's profession, a Christian should be prepared to answer confidently and gracefully with the goal of putting the grieving loved one's mind at ease with the truth. As there is no direct biblical instruction or answer to this question, the problem requires a Christian to seek the Scriptures prayerfully and to consider insights from trusted theologians. The result of that effort lies herein. As such, the purpose of this paper is to demonstrate that, despite the Bible's lack of direct teaching on

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the outcome of infant mortality, studying the Scriptures can provide the answer that loved ones so desperately seek when an infant dies; that is, all infants who die go to heaven.<sup>2</sup>

To accomplish this purpose, this paper first addresses a series of topics in anthropology, hamartiology, soteriology, theology proper, and personal eschatology, in a manner that builds one biblical truth upon the next as the research progresses. The paper addresses some erroneous beliefs about infant salvation and then provides a review of specific biblical examples demonstrating, throughout history, God's dealings with and regard for children. Lastly, the paper presents the one biblical example of infant death (2 Sam 12:23) that provides some insight into the heavenly destination of the child. The paper closes with recognition of some of the remaining unknowns on the matter of infant salvation.

### **The Life of a Child**

Consideration of God's relationship with man is essential in laying a foundation for questions on infant mortality. Scripture is abundantly clear that God knows every detail about a child from the moment of conception. David recognized God's involvement in every part of his creation and being in Psalm 139:1–4, 13–16. God told the prophet Jeremiah that he knew Jeremiah intimately before he was born (Jer 1:5). John MacArthur writes, "Indeed He knew all about *you* before you even had words in your mouth or thoughts in your mind, even before you could walk or act on your own."<sup>3</sup> Further, God is responsible for the very birth of a child (Ps 22:9). David wrote that God numbered man's days before even one day of his life

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<sup>2</sup> Throughout this paper, the term "infant," "child," or "baby" is intended to include any child, born or unborn, that dies prior to attaining an age of accountability or ability to understand his or her position as a sinner and the need for a Savior, as well as a knowledge of good and evil. This paper will address the theological issues thoroughly, but the need here is to establish *who* is included in the terms "infant," "child," etc. Additionally, it is this writer's intent to include the mentally handicapped of any age in this category of "child."

<sup>3</sup> John MacArthur, *Safe in the Arms of God* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2003), 15. Emphasis original.

came into being (Ps 139:16). Addressing parents, MacArthur explains the importance of this truth as it relates to the life of a child: “God knew precisely how long your child would live and for what purpose your child would live. Your child’s destiny was and is in His hands.”<sup>4</sup>

### Original Sin

Critical to the discussion of infant salvation is the concept of original sin. From Adam’s first sin in the garden, mankind is plagued with an inherent sin nature. R. C. Sproul explains, “Original sin does not refer to the first sin that was committed, but rather to the result of that—entrance of sin into the world so that all of us as human beings are born in a fallen state.”<sup>5</sup> This curse of original sin is present at birth (Gen 8:21; Ps 51:5; 58:3). It is a condition for which there is no cure (Prov 20:9; Eccl 7:20) and is deserving only of God’s wrath (Eph 2:3), apart from the saving work of Christ (Rom 5:6–11; 6:23; 8:1–8). Kenneth M. Gardoski observes that “this is why even infants die in the first place: they are born with the guilt of Adam’s sin engraved upon their hearts and fused into their very nature. The wages of sin is death (Rom 6:23).”<sup>6</sup> It is important to note that while man’s heart is inherently sinful (Jer 17:9; Rom 3:10–12), the idea that infants could commit sins is not supported by Scripture. “Though fallen creatures like all Adam’s offspring, infants are not culpable in the same sense as those whose sins are willful and premeditated.”<sup>7</sup> The distinction of original sin versus willful sin is critical to the forthcoming discussion on the consequence of the original sin of infants.

### Knowledge of Good and Evil

When the Israelites rebelled and refused to enter the promised land, the Lord penalized them by keeping the entire

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<sup>4</sup> MacArthur, *Safe*, 20.

<sup>5</sup> R. C. Sproul, *Now, That’s a Good Question!* (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House, 1996), 295.

<sup>6</sup> Kenneth M. Gardoski, “The Salvation of Infants” (paper, Baptist Bible Seminary, April 2011), 4, accessed January 24, 2018, <https://butbyhisgrace.files.wordpress.com/2011/04/salvationinfants.pdf>.

<sup>7</sup> MacArthur, *Safe*, 35.

generation out of the land he had promised. However, the Lord also said that the children of the generation of rebels, “who today have no knowledge of good or evil, they shall go in there. And to them I will give it, and they shall possess it” (Deut 1:39).<sup>8</sup> This passage contributes to developing the answer to the question at hand because it establishes that God recognizes that infants are unaware of the difference between right and wrong. As discussed in the first section of this paper, God knows everything there is to know about children, including their unspoken words and their thoughts. Scripture has evidenced that God uses his intimate knowledge of young children to their benefit, treats them differently than mature children and adults, and recognizes their relative innocence (Jer 2:34; 19:4–7). The concept of the knowledge of good and evil contributes to the lack of culpability of children for anything more than their original sin.

Several other Scriptures illustrate this position. Gardoski explains God’s view of the innocence of young children, using Jonah 4:11 and Romans 9:11 as examples. He writes,

The Scriptures do teach that small children possess a relative innocence before God. God does not hold them accountable for personal transgressions, since they are not yet capable of knowing good and evil. They do not even have the intellectual ability to choose between their right and left hand, saying nothing of the moral ability to choose between good and evil.<sup>9</sup>

John Piper uses John 9:41 to reach a similar conclusion that “if a person lacks the natural capacity to see the revelation of God’s will or God’s glory then that person’s sin would not remain—God would not bring the person into final judgment for not believing what he had no natural capacity to see.”<sup>10</sup> Piper also relies on Romans 1:20 for his assertion that “if a person did not

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<sup>8</sup> All Scripture quotations are taken from the ESV, unless otherwise noted.

<sup>9</sup> Gardoski, “Salvation,” 3.

<sup>10</sup> Quoted in Matt Perman, “What Happens to Infants Who Die?” *desiringGod*, January 23, 2006, <https://www.desiringgod.org/articles/what-happens-to-infants-who-die>.

have access to the revelation of God’s glory—did not have the natural capacity to see it and understand it, then Paul implies they would have an excuse at the judgment.”<sup>11</sup> It seems, therefore, that the issue of God’s recognition of a child’s relative innocence ultimately plays a significant part in establishing the answer that all infants go to heaven.

Every infant or child who dies before reaching a condition of moral culpability goes instantly to heaven at death. A child who has not reached moral culpability is a child who has not reached sufficient mature understanding to comprehend convincingly the issues of law and grace, sin and salvation.<sup>12</sup>

### **Willful Sin and Hell**

In contrast to the original sin that all of mankind carries around—infants included—willful sins are voluntary and intentional (Rom 1:29–32; Gal 5:19–21). Sam Storms writes, “There is consistent testimony of Scripture that people are judged on the basis of sins committed voluntary [sic] and consciously in the body (2 Cor 5:20; 1 Cor 6:9–10; Rev 20:11–12).”<sup>13</sup> Scripture is also clear that a rejection of Jesus Christ results in judgment (Luke 10:16; John 12:48; 1 Thess 4:8; Rev 21:8). There is an altogether different outcome for the unrepentant, willful sinner and the adult who is without excuse (Rom 1:19–20), versus the child who only possesses original sin and lacks knowledge of good and evil. MacArthur explains that “nothing ever suggests anyone will be sent to hell merely because of the guilt we inherit from Adam (Ezekiel 18:20).”<sup>14</sup> Storms agrees that “eternal judgment is always based on conscious rejection of divine revelation (whether in creation, conscience, or Christ) and willful disobedience.”<sup>15</sup> Infants and children lacking knowledge of good

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<sup>11</sup> Quoted in Perman, “What Happens.”

<sup>12</sup> MacArthur, *Safe*, 37.

<sup>13</sup> Sam Storms, “Do All Infants Go to Heaven?” The Gospel Coalition, August 20, 2015, <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/do-all-infants-go-to-heaven/>.

<sup>14</sup> John MacArthur, “When Infants Die, Do They Go to Heaven?” *Today’s Christian Woman*, March-April 2004, <http://bit.ly/2YTXiiX>

<sup>15</sup> Storms, “Do All Infants.”

and evil are simply not capable of committing willful sin. Their judgment will be based only on what they are capable of knowing and doing knowingly (Ps 62:12; Prov 24:12; Matt 16:27; Rom 2:6). Storms continues, “Those dying in infancy are saved because they do not (indeed cannot) satisfy the conditions for divine judgment.”<sup>16</sup>

### God’s Character

As demonstrated in the previous section, the perfect justice of God is displayed in his judgment (Zeph 3:5; Rom 2:6). However, justice is not the only attribute of God that is relevant to the topic of infant salvation. All of God’s attributes should be held in balance with one another because “it is all the attributes of God taken together that provide an understanding of the nature and Person of God.”<sup>17</sup> Additionally, Robert P. Lightner explains, “God’s attributes are not so many qualities that are attached to His Person. Neither are they simply acts which He does. He actually is each of these things. They are His essence. They describe His person, not merely His behavior.”<sup>18</sup> With this in mind, Psalm 145:9 says, “The Lord is good to all, and his mercy is over all that he has made.” Psalm 86:15 reads, “But you, O Lord, are a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness.” These psalms remind the Christian that it is God, with his mercy and grace, who is at work in the process of infant salvation. God is always merciful, and his grace extends to all of his creation, including infants.

Christians can also find comfort in God’s love (1 John 4:16), his goodness (Nah 1:7), and his wisdom (Job 12:13) when a child passes away.

We can trust the character of God—the one who loves us so much that he came and gave himself for us. We can be confident that his

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<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

<sup>17</sup> Paul Enns, *The Moody Handbook of Theology*, Rev. ed. (Chicago: Moody, 2014), 194.

<sup>18</sup> Robert P. Lightner, *Heaven for Those Who Can’t Believe* (Schaumburg, IL: Regular Baptist P, 1973), 19.

judgments are always right, his nature is always good, his mercy is always wide, and his desire for people to be saved is greater still than ours.<sup>19</sup>

God not only knows what is best for an infant who has died (Rom 8:28) but he also always carries out his will for that infant, in life and in death (Rom 8:38–39).

We can be assured that God will do what is right and loving because He is the standard of rightness and love. Those considerations alone seem to be evidence enough of God’s particular, electing love shown to the unborn and those who die young.<sup>20</sup>

### **On What Basis Could Infants Be Saved?**

As each of these scriptural truths continues to build on and develop one another, a Christian is left to consider one question. That is, “On what basis could individuals who die in infancy possibly be saved?”<sup>21</sup> The answer in a word is grace—just like everyone else. To develop this further, one might turn to the basic foundations of the Christian faith. “For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast” (Eph 2:8–9). Infants are saved by grace and the power of Christ’s shed blood atonement, just as anyone else experiences salvation. B. B. Warfield said,

Their destiny is determined irrespective of their choice, by an unconditional decree of God, suspended for its execution on no act

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<sup>19</sup> Andrew Wilson, “Do Babies Go to Heaven?” *Christianity Today*, November 1, 2015, <http://web.b.ebscohost.com.ezproxy.clarksummitu.edu/ehost/pdfviewer/pdfviewer?vid=4&sid=4d041810-450d-40c1-bf04-37975e8e84ee%40sessionmgr103>.

<sup>20</sup> John MacArthur, “Do Babies and Others Incapable of Professing Faith in Christ Automatically Go to Heaven?” *Grace To You*, accessed January 24, 2018, <https://www.gty.org/library/questions/QA101/do-babies-and-others-incapable-of-professing-faith-in-christ-automatically-go-to-heaven>.

<sup>21</sup> Gardoski, “Salvation,” 4.

of their own; and their salvation is wrought by an unconditional application of the grace of Christ to their souls, through the immediate and irresistible operation of the Holy Spirit prior to and apart from any action of their own proper wills. And if death in infancy does depend on God's providence, it is assuredly God in His providence who selects this vast multitude to be made participants of His unconditional salvation. This is but to say that they are unconditionally predestined to salvation from the foundation of the world.<sup>22</sup>

However, one cannot help but realize that there is also an aspect of salvation by grace that infants are unable to accomplish, and that is faith (Rom 10:17; Gal 2:16). Therefore, there is an aspect of infant salvation by grace that is different from that of a believer. Sproul writes that "infants who die are given a special dispensation of the grace of God."<sup>23</sup> MacArthur contends that this saving grace is the simplest expression of the gospel. "Salvation has nothing to do with our initiative or accomplishment. Salvation is all by grace. There is no clearer manifestation of this truth than the gift of eternal life given to a helpless, lost infant."<sup>24</sup>

Are there aspects of the method God uses for infant salvation that are beyond comprehension and even beyond disclosure by the Scriptures? Yes, certainly. Storms affirms that infant salvation is "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."<sup>25</sup> It is here, at this point, that each of the aforementioned truths—God's intimate knowledge of each child and his or her purpose, original sin, knowledge of good and

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<sup>22</sup> B. B. Warfield, *Two Studies in the History of Doctrine: Augustine and the Pelagian Controversy: The Development of the Doctrine of Infant Salvation* (New York: The Christian Literature Company, 1897), 230.

<sup>23</sup> R. C. Sproul, "What Happens to Children Who Die Before They Can Accept the Gospel?" *Ligonier*, 1996, accessed January 24, 2018, <https://www.ligonier.org/learn/qas/what-happens-children-who-die-they-can-accept-gosp/>.

<sup>24</sup> MacArthur, *Safe*, 77.

<sup>25</sup> Storms, "Do All Infants."

evil, a child's relative innocence, willful sin as a primary component of judgment, and God's merciful grace—all come together. Piper summarizes,

The point for us is that even though we human beings are under the penalty of everlasting judgment and death because of the fall of our race into sin and the sinful nature that we all have, nevertheless God only executes this judgment on those who have the natural capacity to see his glory and understand his will, and refuse to embrace him as their treasure. Infants, I believe do not yet have that capacity, and therefore in God's inscrutable way, he brings them under the forgiving blood of his Son.<sup>26</sup>

### **Erroneous Beliefs About Infant Salvation**

There are many widespread erroneous beliefs about infant salvation that are worth noting at this point.<sup>27</sup> The first of these is the belief that infants and children can be saved by the sacrament of baptism, also known as baptismal regeneration. This belief is traditionally held by those in the Roman Catholic Church. They affirm that “baptism is the source of that new life in Christ from which the entire Christian life springs forth.”<sup>28</sup> Furthermore, their Catechism states, “The Church does not know of any means other than Baptism that assures entry into eternal beatitude.”<sup>29</sup> Foundational to this false notion is the belief that “baptism is a means by which God imparts saving grace; it results in the remission of sins. By either awakening or strengthening faith, baptism effects the washing of regeneration.”<sup>30</sup> One problem with this view is that it allows no provision for the

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<sup>26</sup> Quoted in Perman, “What Happens.”

<sup>27</sup> There are numerous erroneous theories within the concept of infant salvation, many of which are not covered by this paper, due to its intentionally limited scope. They were omitted in an effort to maintain a focus on the basis upon which infants can be saved, and not the myriad ways they cannot. Only a few of the most prominently held are presented.

<sup>28</sup> “Catechism of the Catholic Church,” *Libreria Editrice Vaticana*, accessed May 30, 2018, [http://www.vatican.va/archive/ENG0015/\\_\\_\\_P3K.HTM](http://www.vatican.va/archive/ENG0015/___P3K.HTM). This direct quote is taken from paragraph 1254.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, par. 1257.

<sup>30</sup> Enns, *Moody Handbook*, 379.

unborn. Further, MacArthur explains that “baptism cannot save any person. It is an ordinance clearly presented in the Scriptures as an act of obedient testimony of those who willfully believe the gospel—impossible for infants to do.”<sup>31</sup>

Another erroneous belief is that some infants can be saved by being a child of an elect parent, also known as the elect-infant view or presumptive regeneration. Those with beliefs in covenant theology often hold this view. This view was held by the writers of the *Canons of Dort* which states,

Since we must make judgments about God’s will from his Word, which testifies that the children of believers are holy, not by nature but by virtue of the gracious covenant in which they together with their parents are included, godly parents ought not to doubt the election and salvation of their children whom God calls out of this life in infancy.<sup>32</sup>

A similar view is presented in the *Westminster Confession* although the covenant aspect is not mentioned.<sup>33</sup>

Additionally, the elect-infant view offers no hope for infants of unbelievers. Norman Geisler writes, “The elect-infant view presents an indescribably severe conceptualization of God’s justice and mercy.”<sup>34</sup> Undeniably, this argument addresses some touchpoints in the Calvinist-Arminian debate that are beyond the scope of this discussion. However, it is worth noting for purposes of this paper that the elect-infant view is problematic in the sense that it calls into question God’s omnibenevolent character (John 3:16; Rom 5:6–8).

A third erroneous view is the belief that infants will have an after-death opportunity to profess their faith in Christ, so that they may accomplish the same requirements for salvation as

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<sup>31</sup> MacArthur, *Safe*, 74.

<sup>32</sup> Quoted in Tim Challies, “Original Sin & the Death of Infants (2),” *Challies* (blog). July 20, 2006, <https://www.challies.com/articles/original-sin-the-death-of-infants-2/>

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>34</sup> Norman Geisler, *Systematic Theology*, vol. 3, Sin, Salvation (Minneapolis: Bethany House, 2004), 440.

adults. Proponents of this view believe that infants will be allowed to mature in heaven, at which time they will “decide for themselves where they will spend eternity.”<sup>35</sup> In addition to what seems to be a complete lack of scriptural evidence for this view, there is significant support for the belief that there exists no opportunity for salvation after death (Luke 16:26–31; John 8:24; Heb 9:27). Having reviewed several erroneous views on infant salvation, this paper now turns back to Scripture and reviews God’s dealings with children as written in his Word.

### **God’s Dealings with and Regard for Children in Scripture**

Once the foundational knowledge presented thus far is established, Christians can seek scriptural examples of God’s dealings with and regard for children for further guidance, comfort, and encouragement. These examples will provide confidence in the knowledge that all infants who die are saved. However, before addressing the one example in Scripture that best illustrates the outcome of infant death (2 Sam 12:23), this paper will review other examples that lend indirectly to the question of infant salvation.

Scripture illustrates in 2 Samuel 7 as well as in 2 Samuel 12:24–25 that “God *predicted* His love for Solomon before Solomon’s birth, He *confirmed* that love at Solomon’s birth, and He *never withdrew* His lovingkindness from Solomon.”<sup>36</sup> While this does not demonstrate infant salvation, it does demonstrate God’s knowledge of his love for Solomon before he was born. This is the type of knowledge that only the Creator can have (Psalm 139), as illustrated in an earlier section of this paper.

Two other Scriptures that demonstrate God’s knowledge and election of infants before birth are Jeremiah 1:5 and Galatians 1:15. Of Jeremiah 1:5, Warren W. Wiersbe explains, “God *sanctified* Jeremiah even before he was born. This means Jeremiah was set apart by the Lord and for the Lord even before

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<sup>35</sup> Geisler, *Systematic Theology*, 452.

<sup>36</sup> Gardoski, “Salvation,” 6. Emphasis original.

he knew the Lord in a personal way.”<sup>37</sup> Paul’s statement in Galatians 1:15 is particularly helpful, as it illustrates the work of grace involved in God’s election. “But when he who had set me apart before I was born, and who called me by his grace” (Gal 1:15). A similar calling is found with the prophet Isaiah as described in Isaiah 49:1–6. While one might argue that these are isolated, particular arrangements, the Scriptures still illustrate that such election is possible.

Romans 9:11–13 is of significant use in the discussion of infant salvation. Here Paul reveals that before Jacob and Esau were born, God had elected Jacob for God’s purpose “though they were not yet born and had done nothing either good or bad” (Rom 9:11). Gardoski explains, “God chose to love Jacob and have mercy and compassion on him before he was even born.”<sup>38</sup> Douglas J. Moo, referencing this same passage, explains the certainty one can have in the power of God’s grace involved in Jacob’s election saying,

Surely, if Paul had assumed that faith was the basis for God’s election, he would have pointed this out when he raised the question in v. 14 about the fairness of God’s election. All he would have needed to say at that point was ‘of course God is not unjust in choosing Jacob and rejecting Esau, for his choosing took into account the faith of one and the unbelief of the other.’<sup>39</sup>

The New Testament teaches of God’s election of John the Baptist while he was still in his mother’s womb (Luke 1:15). Even more profound, however, is Luke’s record of John possessing salvation *before he was born*, as the passage states that he was filled with the Holy Spirit while still in the womb. Gardoski illustrates the importance of this verse in that “here, then, we have a true biblical example of the salvation of an infant,

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<sup>37</sup> Warren W. Wiersbe, *The Bible Exposition Commentary: Old Testament Prophets* (Colorado Springs: David C. Cook, 2002), 77. Emphasis original.

<sup>38</sup> Gardoski, “Salvation,” 6.

<sup>39</sup> Douglas J. Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans*, NICNT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996), 583.

and what God did in the case of John the Baptist He is surely capable of doing for others.”<sup>40</sup> Understandably, this is not a normative example of how God saves his people.

Perhaps the quintessential passage of Scripture demonstrating God’s regard for children is Matthew 19:14: “But Jesus said, ‘Let the little children come to me and do not hinder them, for to such belongs the kingdom of heaven’” (cf. Mark 10:14; Luke 18:16). MacArthur makes an important comparison using this verse. “I don’t know of any place in the New Testament in which Jesus blesses ‘nonbelievers.’ There’s no place in which Jesus blesses the ‘cursed’ or the ‘damned.’”<sup>41</sup> Additionally, MacArthur writes, “I cannot imagine that the same Savior who blessed little babies and said, ‘of such is the kingdom of heaven’ secretly intended to deny them that mercy.”<sup>42</sup> MacArthur’s argument is sound, and the Scriptures are clear that Jesus regarded these little children with the utmost love and compassion. R. Albert Mohler provides guidance on how this passage translates to infant salvation, and writes, “We believe that our Lord graciously and freely received all those who die in infancy—not on the basis of their innocence or worthiness—but by his grace, made theirs through the atonement He purchased on the cross.”<sup>43</sup>

### A Review of 2 Samuel 12:23

Consideration will now be given to the single instance of Scripture that provides insight into the salvation of an infant who has died. The entire pericope containing the death of David’s infant son (2 Sam 12:15–23) is perhaps the most commonly referenced passage on the issue of infant death because of David’s statement as recorded in 2 Samuel 12:23—“But now he is dead. Why should I fast? Can I bring him back again? I shall go to him, but he will not return to me.” MacArthur explains that

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<sup>40</sup> Gardoski, “Salvation,” 6.

<sup>41</sup> MacArthur, *Safe*, 59.

<sup>42</sup> MacArthur, “When Infants Die.”

<sup>43</sup> R. Albert Mohler, Jr., “The Salvation of the ‘Little Ones’: Do Infants Who Die Go to Heaven?” *Albert Mohler*, July 16, 2009, <https://albertmohler.com/2009/07/16/the-salvation-of-the-little-ones-do-infants-who-die-go-to-heaven/>.

David's expression is "an expression of great hope and confidence, not a groan of futility."<sup>44</sup> Beyond David's words in verse 23, however, the reader can learn from David's actions in the earlier verses (vv. 19–20). "David's behavior indicates that he had assurance that his infant son was with the Lord in heaven."<sup>45</sup> Indeed, David calmly arose and prepared himself, through washing and anointing, and worshipped the Lord (v. 20). Afterward, he returned home, ate, and resumed normal behaviors (v. 24). This is, of course, a marked change from David's earlier behavior when his son was sick (vv. 16–17).

These are the actions of a parent soothed by the assurance of his child's salvation. A host of theologians agree, and their commentaries on this critical passage of Scripture are worthy of review. MacArthur explains, "Here's the key to the change in David. He ceased his mourning after the baby died. He felt no further reason to fast and pray because his sorrow was instantly and completely replaced by hope."<sup>46</sup> Gardoski writes, "David's answer [vv. 22–23] indicates a calm assurance that even though he had lost his son, the child was safe with the Lord."<sup>47</sup> Lightner writes,

That he would in the future again be with his son was his firm belief. The Psalmist never doubted that for a moment. David was rightly related to Jehovah, and he had no doubt that he would spend eternity with Him. Neither did he have any doubt that his infant son, taken in death before he could decide for or against his father's God would be there also.<sup>48</sup>

Sproul writes, "David is given the confidence that he will see that child again in heaven. That story of David and his dying child gives a tremendous consolation to parents who have lost infants to death."<sup>49</sup> The evidence for the salvation of David's infant son

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<sup>44</sup> MacArthur, "When Infants Die."

<sup>45</sup> Gardoski, "Salvation," 7.

<sup>46</sup> MacArthur, *Safe*, 93.

<sup>47</sup> Gardoski, "Salvation," 7.

<sup>48</sup> Lightner, *Heaven*, 32-33.

<sup>49</sup> Sproul, *Now*, 295.

is seemingly insurmountable.<sup>50</sup> Though evidence for David's hope is clear, Wiersbe explains where David's hope was focused. "David expected to see and recognize his son in the future life. Where was David eventually going? 'I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever' (Ps 23:6 NKJV)."<sup>51</sup>

### Unknowns

While this paper has served to review the relevant scriptural and theological considerations involved in answering the question at hand, and while the goal has been to enable and encourage a confident belief in the knowledge that all infants who die go to heaven, it is not to say that all possible questions have been answered. Most assuredly, and as with any complex theological issue, there are certainly still some unknowns. Will infants grow up in heaven? How old will they be when their saved parents arrive in heaven? Will parents recognize their infants if they have grown? If so, how? There are many more questions than there are answers.

MacArthur, however, believes that "the Bible leaves enough in the realm of mystery. . . while reassuring us God is gracious and compassionate, and his tender mercies are over all his works (Psalm 145:9)."<sup>52</sup> Lightner is confident that everyone in heaven will be the same age and maturity, though he admitted that exactly what that age is, is unknown.<sup>53</sup> Piper recognizes the limitations of the scriptural evidence as well. "God in his justice will find a way to absolve infants who die of their depravity. It will surely be through Christ. But beyond that, we would be guessing."<sup>54</sup> He continues by proposing, "It seems to me that the most natural guess would be that babies will grow up in the kingdom (either immediately, or over time) and will by God's grace come to faith so that their justification is by faith alone just

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<sup>50</sup> Though some argue that David's statement, "I shall go to him" is merely David's acknowledgment that he, too, will die and thereby will go with his son into death.

<sup>51</sup> Warren W. Wiersbe, *The Bible Exposition Commentary: Old Testament History* (Colorado Springs: David C. Cook, 2002), 339.

<sup>52</sup> MacArthur, "When Infants Die."

<sup>53</sup> Lightner, *Heaven*, 46.

<sup>54</sup> Quoted in Perman, "What Happens."

like ours.”<sup>55</sup> Additionally, although each of the theological issues addressed throughout this paper are important in the development of a solid argument for infant salvation, some Christians might suggest that one should first begin with the goodness and mercy of God and see everything else through that perspective. Perman writes, “The bottom line is the goodness of God—that is the hope for us all, and the only hope.”<sup>56</sup>

## Conclusion

R. Albert Mohler writes,

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 know that heaven will be filled with those who never grew to maturity on earth, but in heaven will greet us completed in Christ.<sup>57</sup>

The desire is that this paper has demonstrated that there is, indeed, no need to rely on sentimentalism when seeking an answer to the question, “What happens to infants who die?” Despite the Bible’s lack of direct teaching on the outcome of infant mortality, studying the biblical teaching about the life of a child, original sin, knowledge of good and evil, willful sin and hell, God’s character, God’s dealings with and regard for children, as well as relevant scriptural examples, enables Christians to be confident in providing the answer that loved ones so desperately seek when an infant dies; that is, all infants who die go to heaven. This writer desires that more Christians will prepare themselves to answer this question confidently, gracefully, and affirmatively, putting grieving loved ones’ minds at ease with the truth that all infants experience salvation.

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<sup>55</sup> Ibid. It is unclear from Piper’s comments here as to how close his views are to the after-death view presented above.

<sup>56</sup> Perman, “What Happens.”

<sup>57</sup> Mohler, “Salvation.”