

Do Babies Really Go To Heaven?

The Singer, Part 16

2 Samuel 12:14-23

One of the most heart-rending passages occurs in the biography of David in 2 Samuel chapter 12. And it opens the door to one of the most interesting questions a believer is led to think through.

Following Nathan's confrontation, Bathsheba delivers the baby conceived in sin with David. We're told in *verse 15 that the baby becomes sick. 16. David therefore sought God on behalf of the child. And David fasted and went in and lay all night on the ground. 17. And the elders of his house stood beside him, to raise him from the ground, but he would not, nor did he eat food with them. 18. On the seventh day the child died. And the servants of David were afraid to tell him that the child was dead, for they said, "Behold, while the child was yet alive, we spoke to him, and he did not listen to us. How then can we say to him the child is dead? He may do himself some harm." 19. But when David saw that his servants were whispering together, David understood that the child was dead. And David said to his servants, "Is the child dead?" They said, "He is dead." 20. Then David arose from the earth and washed and anointed himself and changed his clothes. And he went into the house of the Lord and worshiped. He then went to his own house. And when he asked, they set food before him, and he ate. 21. Then his servants said to him, "What is this thing that you have done? You fasted and wept for the child while he was alive; but when the child died, you arose and ate food." 22. He said, "While the child was still alive, I fasted and wept, for I said, 'Who knows whether the Lord will be gracious to me, that the child may live?' 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."*

In the death of David's baby, David and Bathsheba became a part of a community of sufferers – a community that has only grown by the millions down through the ages.

Regardless of the fact that their baby's death was uniquely part of God's discipline for their sin – the Lord could have disciplined them any number of ways.

Evidently, according to the plan – and the mercy of God – as I mentioned in our last study – this baby was taken by death.

But this text raises this heart rending issue – an issue which millions of parents have had to suffer through – moms and dads who have experienced firsthand that language of suffering through the loss of a baby.

Infant mortality is a term technically used to refer to the death of a baby before its first birthday.

I found it tragically profound that the State of North Carolina is one of the top 3 states with the highest infant mortality rate in the country. Nearly 8 babies out of every 1,000 live births end in the death of the child; which means that in the past year, out of the 120,000 babies born in the State of North Carolina, more than 900 babies died before their first birthday.ⁱ

If you add to this number, the number of babies that are miscarried, the number skyrockets.

In fact, if you work off global statistics, the numbers are astronomical.

One world health organization reports that in one year alone, more than 4 million babies died. In countries like Afghanistan, for example, the rather of infant mortality is 100 times greater than America. Experts in this field estimate that the actual figure of infant mortality is somewhere around 10 million babies a year.ⁱⁱ

If you add up all the years of human history – you begin to stagger under this thought – a thought that came to me at this juncture in the biography of King David – there are millions upon millions of babies who enter eternity before they reached their first birthday.

The weeping of mothers and fathers over still births, miscarriages and the deaths of infants are shedding rivers of tears.

And in the aftermath, the question surfaces sooner or later, "Where are they all?"

Now in this text, David clearly states that he and his baby are going to have a reunion in the future.

Some would say that David is merely talking about the grave – in other words, he's saying, "I'm

going to die and be buried just like my baby boy has died and will be buried.”

Others would insist that David is saying that his baby is now in the Father’s House – and that’s where David has clearly understood he himself will be one day – **“I shall dwell in the house of the Lord forever” (Psalm 23:6)**; in other words, I’m going to be reunited with my baby in Heaven one day.

This passage opens the door to that most profound of questions. Do babies really go to heaven?

And what about the millions of miscarried babies, annually? And aborted babies . . . around 1 million a year in this country alone.

We’re literally talking about millions of babies entering eternity annually; from what I could uncover in my study, in global numbers, it’s on an average of 41,000 babies every single day.

And since we as believers happen to believe what the Bible says about an eternal future, we have to be honest enough to admit then that either hell is receiving millions of babies every year – or heaven – or both, depending.

As a pastor, I have been involved in no doubt some of the most heart wrenching moments of ministry – those moments when I have been called to a delivery room only to hold a still born baby, or a baby born with a defect that brought about death within moments of birth.

And I can tell you at moments like that, the question that is greater than any other question on earth is, “Do babies go to heaven when they die?”

While it would be easy to put our hope in something sentimental or optimistic . . . or create some kind of religious answer to try and soothe the aching heart . . . what does God’s word actually lead us to believe?

Well for starters, there isn’t one verse that settles all of the issue – there isn’t one neatly packaged verse that clarifies that the death of the pre-born, the miscarried, the aborted, or even the mentally disabled – what we could call perpetual children – that they are immediately ushered into heaven.

And by the way, there isn’t a verse that clearly states babies go to hell either; or that some go to heaven and all the others go to suffer in hell.

In order to answer the question biblically, we have to compare scripture with scripture; we have to tie one theological truth to another in order to arrive at an answer.

But this I can assure you – I have no doubt in my mind that God wants us to deal with this subject – if

for no other reason than the fact that we’re dealing with the subject of the eternal destiny of multiplied millions and millions of eternal souls.

To begin putting the biblical clues together, we have to answer several questions.

The question, “Do pre-borns or newborns go to heaven when they’re life is over?” isn’t the first question to answer.

The first question to deal with is:

1. **When does a baby’s life actually begin?**

And fortunately there’s a lot of information on that question.

It’s found in one of David’s classic Psalms – the 139th Psalm, where David takes us, via divine revelation into the womb of a mother.

Hold your finger in 2 Samuel and turn over to Psalm 139. We did a lengthy study of this Psalm over several Sunday evening sessions together, but let me quickly review what David reveals by means of inspired scripture.

Notice how he praises God in **verse 13 – For you formed my inward parts, you knitted me together in my mother’s womb.**

David pictures God sitting at a sewing machine – or in his day, a weaver’s shuttle. David informs us that God is choosing the thread and the colors and the style and pattern and He’s creatively weaving us together.

Notice verse 14. I praise you, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made.

- The word David uses that’s translated **fearfully** could be translated amazingly.
- The word translated **wonderfully** – I am fearfully and **wonderfully** made – that word could be rendered, **uniquely**.

David is boasting in his creator God by singing, “I am amazingly and uniquely created by God who formed even the tiniest part of me, weaving me together in the womb.”

Time Magazine named Peter Singer to the list of 100 most influential people; he’s a professor of bioethics at Princeton University and was recently awarded for his work in philosophy and bioethics.

He has created a firestorm over the years for his brutal and yet – I must add – logical ethical system. It’s an ethical system devoid of any kind of moral absolute – and for this our world applauds him.

He simply takes his evolutionary belief system to its chilling, practical conclusions and applications.

He has gone on record – and he isn't alone, by the way – that since we're really nothing more than highly evolved animals, it is morally acceptable for a baby to be put to death within 30 days of its birth – it can be completely left to the will of the parent or guardian.

Why not . . . animals abandon their young or even kill them if they want to.

Dr. Singer has publically stated that parents ought to be allowed to kill their children, up to one year of age, if they evidence any kind of mental or physical disabilities.

Of course, based on his evolutionary system of ethics, he really doesn't have any grounds to stop at age 1. Why age 1?

In fact, he also stated that killing children specifically to harvest their organs for the benefit of older, physically ill children is morally acceptable.

And Princeton University actually pays this guy to teach a generation of students this perspective.

But it is a perspective that logically flows from evolution – the survival of the fittest animal. Singer gets at that when he says, and I quote, “We can no longer base our ethics on the idea that human beings are a special form of creation made in the image of God and singled out from all other animals.”ⁱⁱⁱ

In other words, forget the biblical declaration of origins and the concept of a creator God and His order of creation – which has, at the pinnacle of creation, a unique, eternal, spiritually capable and morally self-conscious human being.

But if God had nothing to do with our creation anyway – we're just animals too – and so all our ethics can change.

Dr. Singer is effectively concluding that since humans are really evolved animals, if they don't want to keep their young; or if they want to kill their young and give their organs to their siblings, there isn't anything morally wrong with that.

God had nothing to do with who you are . . . you just got lucky enough to be at the top of the food chain.

Dr. Singer is not singing David's lyrics, is he?

David, the Singer King, is singing something entirely different. ***Verse 15. My frame was not hidden from you (God), when I was being made in secret.***

The Hebrew term for frame refers to bones – our skeletal structure. He's saying here that God was involved in the very development of his skeleton.

That means if you have big bones – and mine seem to be getting bigger – God designed them that way.

David writes further in ***verse 15b. we are intricately woven (or embroidered) in the depths of the earth.***

The depths of the earth is a metaphorical reference to the dark, hidden recesses of the womb.

God, the Creator, has been at work – not just in times past, but in every mother's womb, embroidering you by His creative design.

By the way, this also means that God designed you to have not only physical abilities, but physical disabilities – woven into your being from the start.

Understood properly then, every ability you have and every disability you have means that you and I were designed uniquely, to learn to uniquely trust in God for grace and strength, and also to learn to surrender to Him and give Him our trust and honor and glory.

And also – don't miss this – to uniquely long for the blessings in the perfection of our future glorified bodies that others around you won't even begin to appreciate as much you do.

David says in ***verse 16. Your eyes say my unformed substance; in your book were written, every one of them, the days that were formed for me, when as yet there was none of them.***

We tend to forget that a man and a woman do not create life – we are simply the secondary cause, in the plan of God, to bring sperm and egg together, but God actually determines life and breath.

David writes here that ***ordains our days even before there is one of them.***

So the fact that there is something of life occurring at the moment of conception is actually the creative work of God according to His divine purposes.

The words David chose here are loaded: he writes that God saw his ***unformed substance*** – that's actually one word in the Hebrew language. It's a word that defines something that even David didn't know much about prior to prenatal science and discovery.

It's a Hebrew word that can be accurately translated – embryo.^{iv}

David is literally saying, “He – God – designed my embryo . . . substance under formation in the womb – substance not yet perfected – but living . . . and developing.”

This Psalm is clear that every life conceived is a person – not yet perfected, but living . . . developing . . .

As one author put it then, life begins at conception. And any death that occurs after the moment of conception is the death of a person. And every person, at the moment of life, is from then on, an eternal soul.^v

Listen to the eternal reach of God the Father – and the references to the personhood of a preborn prophet. God is speaking to Jeremiah the prophet when he says, **“Before I formed you in the womb I knew you; before you were born I sanctified you; I ordained you a prophet to the nations.”** (*Jeremiah 1:4-5*)

Did you notice, God said, **“I formed you . . . I knew you . . . before you were born I sanctified you.”**

The Lord didn’t consider Jeremiah to be some lump of impersonal tissue in the womb – some anonymous appendage to a mother’s body – a fetus that wasn’t really a living person.

In the womb, both Jeremiah and David are viewed by God as living persons.

David couldn’t be any clearer – God knows as much about you in the first few hours when you were an unformed substance – an embryo – as He knows about you today. He sees you fully and completely in the context of eternity.^{vi}

In fact, He already sees you as perfectly glorified – immortal – **seated with Christ in the heavenlies** (*Ephesians 2:6*)

Here’s the staggering truth – John MacArthur writes in his commentary – “Life begins by [the will and power of] a Creator God; every child conceived is a God created and God-loved person with a God-given purpose and destiny.”^{vii}

Evidently, for millions and millions of pre-born – miscarried – infants, God’s purposes for their lives on earth were fulfilled in the mystery of His sovereignty in a matter of moments, or a matter of a few months.

Which means then – God’s purposes and destiny for your child’s life was fulfilled perfectly, even if that child died – the reality of God’s purposes for that person are beyond anything we could ever know fully this side of heaven.^{viii}

So, question number 1: when does life begin? It begins at the moment of a God-empowered, God-designed and God-purposed conception. Apart from that, life cannot even begin – for the power of life is in His hand (**Acts 17**).

2. **Another question that needs to be answered and I’ll answer this one much more quickly – Does every person live forever?**

The really short answer is, “yes.”

Being created in the image of God means, among other things, that we have been created eternal beings.

The critical question isn’t so much, “Will you live forever?” – in fact, people on the planet intuitively know that’s true – **they were created – Ecclesiastes 3:11 says – with eternity set/eternity implanted in their heart.**

The critical question isn’t so much, “Will you live forever?” but, “Where will you live forever?”

The reason the question about babies is such a big issue for people inside the church and outside the church is because the law of God has been implanted on the heart of every human being and they know there’s more out there beyond this brief life as we know it.

It’s interesting that as Job struggled with his suffering, he goes into a lengthy description of saying that he wished he had died at birth or even been stillborn.

But rather than go on to imply that he then wouldn’t exist at all, Job actually goes on to describe what heaven must be like for those very infants who died at birth or prior to birth.

He writes in *Job chapter 3:1. Let the day perish on which I was born; and the night that said, “A man is conceived.” Verse 11. Why did I not die at birth? Come out from the womb and expire? Why did the knees receive me? Or why the breasts, that I should nurse? For then I would have slept and been at rest.*

Lest you think he’s referring to some kind of soul sleep or limbo state – he goes on in *verse 16. Why was I not as a hidden stillborn child, as infants who never see the light? There the wicked cease from troubling and there the weary are at rest. There the prisoners are at ease together, they hear not the voice of the taskmaster. The small and the great are there, and the slave is free from his master.*

In other words, Job is describing heaven for these children who died. He compares his life of suffering and misery and sorrow with that of the stillborn child or the infant who dies young and concludes that they have it so much better because they are

now in a place where suffering, toil, strife and weariness are forever gone.^{ix}

Job knows that one day he'll live with his Redeemer (*Job 19:25*), but at the moment, he's saying he wished he'd been able to skip all the suffering of earth and go directly to meet Him.

Job is actually writing under divine inspiration that the stillborn, which would include the aborted, the miscarried, the infant child skips life on earth and goes directly to be with their Creator/Redeemer.

So children live forever too – so . . . any human life is at the moment of conception, not only living, but eternally alive.

They're going to live somewhere forever.

3. **Let me ask a third question that follows closely – is there something we need to do so that infants and children get to live forever in heaven?**

Obviously, this question implies there's no future for the miscarried or the aborted or the stillborn - but we'll ignore that knotty little problem religious catechisms seem to ignore – especially since the Bible clearly answered the question about when life begins.

But to answer this issue, let's deal with infants and children who are birthed and fill their lungs with air.

Is there something we should do to guarantee them heaven?

Of course this is where the religions of the world try and resolve the issue – they've got to give that child some sort of means apart from the grace of God whereby that child will be received into heaven.

Some throughout history have taught that infants, along with everyone else, will have an opportunity to believe in Christ after death. This is actually a view that gained a recent spike in popularity with Rob Bell's book, "Love Wins" . . . eventually everybody gets it right and everyone gets into heaven.

The problem with this view is that nothing of scripture teaches or even hints at postmortem salvation.

The man in *Luke's Gospel and chapter 16* who died, suddenly realized what he'd rejected and found himself in the place of torment. But that new awareness of his lack of repentance and faith and even his admission that he needed the mercy of God didn't save him; instead he ends up pleading that

someone go tell his family that this was where he was so none of them would die without believing.

In other words, his newfound beliefs didn't get him into Paradise, it only added to his suffering because it was forever too late.

Other religious systems make baptism the means to an infant's conversion.

The Lutheran Augsburg Confession says this about baptism: Baptism is necessary to salvation and that by baptism, the grace of God is offered, and that children are to be baptized, who by baptism being offered to God are received into God's favor. This same view is held by Roman Catholics, Anglicans, Episcopalians and [others].^x

Listen, there isn't a shred of biblical evidence that water can somehow guarantee an infant entrance into heaven. The worn out argument that since we're told in Acts 16:33 that the Philippian jailer was saved and then baptized along with his household – that this is proof that the infants in his family were baptized too and thus brought into the community of faith.

The trouble with that view is the preceding verse – verse 32 – which makes it clear that Paul taught the entire household the gospel and then we're told they all were baptized. In other words, everybody in his household was old enough to be taught the word of the Lord and they all believed.

Listen, there isn't any ceremony or initiation or sprinkling or holy water or prayers that are provided in the Bible as the means whereby an infant goes to heaven.

But as we've already seen, David assumes his child will.

How?

Well, some have suggested that children aren't sinners. People who suggest that haven't had any. They certainly didn't raise me.

Others suggest that children are born without a sinful nature . . . at least until they sin.

David cleared that up in *Psalms 51* where God taught us through him that we were conceived tainted from the very start with sin.

In fact, if infants were not considered sinners or morally fallen, they wouldn't die – *for the wages – the payment of sin is death. (Romans 6:23); there is none righteous, no not one (Romans 3:10)*

4. **So my final question – how does a preborn – a still born – a child go to heaven?**

The Bible teaches that we are saved by grace – and that means everyone.

It is the grace of God that anyone is saved, let alone infants.

However, the Bible consistently teaches that while we are saved by grace, we are damned or condemned by works.

Follow me carefully – you can't be saved by works. You can only be saved by grace; however, nowhere in the Bible is anyone ever threatened with hell merely for the guilt inherited from Adam.

John MacArthur writes in his commentary on this subject – whenever Scripture describes the inhabitants of hell, the stress is on their willful acts of sin and rebellion (1 Corinthians 6:9-10; Galatians 5:19-21; Ephesians 5:5). Scripture always connects eternal condemnation with works of unrighteousness and willful sin.^{xi}

By the way, this is exactly why God will take out the books of everyone's deeds as they stand before Him in that final day of judgment (Revelation 20); their works won't be evaluated to see if they can get into heaven; their works and their deeds will be proven to be sinful and willful rebellion against God, worthy of hell.

The stillborn, the miscarried, the newborn and the child will have no such record.

Romans chapter 1 declares that all the world will be without excuse – not because they rejected the gospel, in fact, most of the world will never hear the gospel; they are without excuse and guilty of eternal punishment – get this – because they suppressed the truth about God in creation and they denied the authority of God's law in their conscience.

No infant suppresses the truth; no preborn child has the ability to perceive what God has revealed and then reject it.^{xii}

Until a child is older – and we're never given the age of "older" and accountable" – but until a person can assess in his own heart the law of God written in his conscience; until they can summarize the glories of nature and connect that to the conscious truths about God's attributes of power and eternity; they are not wilfully rebelling against God – suppressing the truth of God.

As one author put it, these little ones aren't saved because they didn't believe, but because they couldn't believe.^{xiii}

Again, you might be thinking, come over to my house and watch my child throw a temper tantrum – or hit his sister over the head with his dump truck. The truth is, children, very early – very early can

demonstrate that they inherited Adam's fallen nature – they can yell, cry, say "no" to their parents – and yes, those actions are sinful.

To quote MacArthur again, he writes, "That young child might even lie to cover their misdeeds; but the child cannot assess in own heart that his actions violate God or that there is any such concept as sin against God and His holy law. He knows that he has done something Mom and Dad don't like because Mom and Dad tell him so. But he has no understanding that his rebellion, lying, stealing, and so forth are in violation of God's law and that such actions have any form of eternal consequence."^{xiv}

Listen to this quote another biblical scholar and author who put it frankly, "If a dead infant were sent to hell on no other account than that of original sin – inherited from Adam – there would be a good reason to the mind of God for the judgment, because sin is a reality. But the child's mind would be a perfect blank as to the reason of its eternal suffering. Under such circumstances, the child would know suffering, but it would have no understanding of the reason for its suffering. The very essence of the penalty would be absent."^{xv}

Here's another interesting point to consider – whenever scripture describes the inhabitants of hell, it always does so with lists of sins and abominations they have deliberately committed against God.

Whenever it describes the inhabitants of heaven, it refers to blood bought, recipients of grace.

The atonement of Jesus Christ, in the mystery of his cross work has made an allowance for the grace of God to bring these little ones to heaven.

When Paul wrote to the *Romans in chapter 5 and verse 19*, he said something interesting that can be interpreted as a reference to this very issue. We're told in *Matthew 7* that *narrow is the gate that leads to life and few there be that find it*. But Paul writes, "*For as by one man's disobedience (Adam) many were made sinners; so also by one Man's obedience (Jesus) many will be made righteous.*"

I would agree with MacArthur and others that while few find the narrow gate – *many are made righteous* is a reference that includes the vast numbers of unborn, newly born, young children, mentally incapable, aborted and miscarried.^{xvi}

By the way, David will stop grieving and mourning after his child dies – why? Because he knows they will one day be reunited; yes, he grieves, yet not as those who have no hope.

In fact, another son of David's will die – his name is Absalom – and David will never stop

grieving . . . among other things he knows that he will never see Absalom again.

5. **One more question – What’s happening with your little one in heaven right now?**

Do you really think I know the answer?

Well actually, I know some things to be true.

First, those who leave earth; who leave their flesh behind, they receive a temporary body, capable of everything we enjoy and more.

There’s no pain, sorrow, suffering, loss . . . only joy, perfect peace and worship.

I know also that the very moment your child went to be with Christ – God’s purposes for him or her were absolutely completed – because all of God’s purposes are always fulfilled perfectly (*Ephesians 1:11*)

I know that your child was made instantly perfect, completely transformed into the image of Jesus Christ (*Philippians 1:6*)

I know your child has a glory about him or her that will never fade away (*Romans 8:18*).

So what happened between conception and heaven? I mean, are there changing tables and strollers and high chairs in heaven.

Are some angels assigned to some kind of heavenly pre-school?

No. Whatever the child’s limitations or immaturities here on earth, they are gone instantly in their immediate glorification and new bodies – just and you and I will experience one day.

And with their immediate transference to heaven, there would have been the miracle of maturity and sound mind and knowledge.

We’re told that the multitude in heaven which cannot be numbered – from every tribe, tongue,

people group and nation – by the way, the gospel will never reach every tribe, tongue and people group until the angels of Revelation fly from one end of the earth to another warning the human race of the coming, final judgment.

So how will there be people representing every people group, every dialect and even from every tribe?

There’s only one way – there will be infants and children representing these tribes and clans and people groups who will testify forever to the grace of God.

And everyone in heaven, John writes, is capable of praising and worshipping and serving God . . . so they evidently possess physical and mental and spiritual maturity to understand the significance of the grace of God in their lives which has given them entrance, by means of the atoning work of Christ’s blood on their behalf – atoning for the sin of those who could not understand in order to believe.

In fact, David said here in 2 Samuel, *my son can’t come back to me, but I will go to him*. The emphasis is on *him*.

David didn’t say, “I’m going to the same place he is . . . I’m going to live forever like he is . . . I’m going to heaven where he is.” No . . . I’m going *to him*.

In other words, I’m going to be introduced one day to my baby boy.

And just as that little one now grown, mature and wholly perfected sings and praises God for His grace, you will be there too . . . one day reunited with him or her and together, you will praise the Lord . . . in worship that will never come to an end.

This manuscript is from a sermon preached on 6/15/2014 by Stephen Davey.

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i adapted from www.nchealthystart.org/infant_mortality/index.htm

ii John MacArthur, *Safe in the Arms of God* (Nelson Books, 2003), p. 4

iii Erwin Lutzer, *Twelve Myths Americans Believe* (Moody Press, 1993), p. 104

iv Henry M. Morris, *Treasures in the Psalms* (Master Books, 2000), p. 223

v MacArthur, p. 13

vi Ibid, p. 18

vii Ibid, p. 32

viii Ibid

ix Adapted from MacArthur, p. 52

x MacArthur, p. 74

xi Ibid, p. 80

xii MacArthur, p. 84

xiii Ibid, p. 82

xiv Ibid, p. 85

xv Ibid, p. 86

xvi Ibid, p. 88