

What Happens to Babies Who Die?
Psalm 139:1-18
Dr. Steve Hereford, Pastor-Teacher
Preached on 1/21/09 © 2009

INTRODUCTION

1. Today is both a sad and happy day in our church and if there is every a time to “weep with those who weep” it is now.
2. On Monday night, Emily McGuire was rushed to surgery for an emergency C-section.
3. Following the birth of hers and Richard’s daughter, whom they named Grace Lee, her heart stopped beating.
4. The doctors sought to resuscitate her but she was already in the arms of Jesus.
5. The family is grieving but they know with certainty they will see their little girl again in eternity.
6. As I stood there with Richard while he held Grace and then cleaned and dressed her, I couldn’t stop thinking that this could have been me back in February when Nathan was born because He was born with his cord around his neck, purple, and not crying.
7. And then I thought this could have been any one of you.
8. None of us can predict such an event.
9. No matter how sophisticated we have become in our medicines, no one can stop the death.

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10. Last week we were at the doctor and they wanted to test our baby that Theresa is carrying for downs syndrome.
11. As I sat there listening to the doctor, I thought in my heart that we will love and care for our child if he has this or not.
12. Today I was reading in John MacArthur's book, "Safe in the Arms of God," a story about a child who was born with down's syndrome and I want to try to read it to you now.
13. I cried through much of us and I am not sure I can read it again without doing the same.
14. After we look at God's Word tonight you will understand why I chose to read this as we address "What Happens to Babies Who Die?"

The father who wrote this is named Mark. He shares:

Bethany came to us in September about five years ago. She was, as all children, a gift from the Lord. She was our third gift—our quiver was full. It was not long after she was born, however, that we became anxious. The nurses were taking too long to bathe her. We had no idea she was in the intensive care unit.

My wife, Diana, never flinched at the clamor of the ICU with all of the blinking, beeping, and shuffling going on around Bethany. She went straight to her new daughter with the same delight, admiration, and warmhearted love and affection she

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had shown to our other two children. I, on the other hand, needed to get a serious grip. I kept babbling on about her future and what might be involved and how we would have to approach her life.

The day after Bethany was born, she was diagnosed as a Down syndrome baby. Only the sovereignty of God held us from collapsing. We blamed each other's families, trembled and shook, and then prayed for guidance. A few days later I came to my senses through the help of more prayer in the presence of my friends. I realized that Bethany was not a syndrome but our child—she was a gift from our loving and wise Father.

The birth of Bethany began a wonderful journey for our family. We discovered a closer walk with God. The compassion of God moved through us as we delighted in caring for her and receiving her love. We were encouraged by the acceptance of Bethany by those in our church, and we were filled with joy and enthusiasm for Bethany's future. I could go on for pages about the special times we all shared with her, the blessings we received, the wisdom we were given, and the closeness we felt with our Savior and Lord.

As Christmas 2000 approached, the hustle and bustle of our lives intensified. We had no idea, however, that this would be the Christmas that would change our lives forever?

Bethany had just turned three, and what a charger she was! From a weak, frail, and sluggish baby, she had become a running, chattering, joyful little busybody! She was attending

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a preschool and was surrounded by friends in the church.

We knew immediately that something was wrong when Bethany awoke sad and did not feel like playing, and then that night, could not sleep and could not stop a mournful cry. We took Bethany to the urgent care facility the next day, then again on the following day, and then again two days later, which was Christmas.

None of the physicians who saw Bethany could tell us what was ailing her. It was only after many medical tests and much observation that she was diagnosed with leukemia on New Year's Eve. I lay in bed with her that night to hold her from crawling off the high hospital bed. Up to that point, her pain was so great she could not move, let alone walk. The amount of morphine they pumped into her little body was tremendous, and even so, she did not lie still until about three o'clock in the morning. Her lungs stopped from time to time that night, and nurses rushed in to jolt her back into breathing. From the day of that diagnosis, our lives intensified greatly. We became utterly dependent on help from God the Father just to get through each day.

Diana was strong in her service to Bethany and believed God would heal her baby. I felt like an empty shell. I walked with a deadened sensation in my body, yet I felt that at any moment I might burst into panic or fear. I wanted to fight, protect, and preserve the life of my little girl, and I felt completely confused and bewildered that there wasn't anything I could do to keep her from getting sicker and sicker. I was humbled to

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the point of feeling completely useless, even as others around me—and I as well—expected me to be able to act courageously, give wise counsel to my family, and serve God.

Once the holidays were over, the physicians made a ?plan? for Bethany’s care. We were encouraged at their prognosis that Bethany had a 90 percent chance of surviving. The physicians prescribed a course of chemotherapy that we followed for the next eleven months. The last three months we were able to administer the chemo at home. Even though Bethany lost all of her beautiful hair and had a plastic tube coming out of her chest that led right into the main vein of her heart, she had no reservations about living life cheerfully.

Bethany was scheduled to have the central line for her chemo removed in October, right after her fourth birthday. After a few weeks of double checking the results of her ten-month chemotherapy regimen, we were crushed to find out the leukemia was back. The physicians now put her chances of survival at 30 to 50 percent.

Shortly after this, we went to Castaic Lake to enjoy the outdoors together as a family. I will never forget that day. Bethany was thrilled at the opportunity to climb the nearby hills—she refused to be carried. I could hardly fathom the grace and mercy of God as I watched my little Down syndrome girl, after ten months of chemotherapy, with her leukemia back at about 41 percent of what it had been before—having the strength and enthusiasm she had. God was teaching us to trust Him and follow His will step by step.

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That night, I found Bethany sitting on the floor, busy with her toys. I sat down with her on the floor to play. She was so precious—fond memories began to flood my mind of the joyful times we had shared. I wept desperately at the thought of losing her. Bethany patted me on the head and asked, ‘Wha? happen, Papa? Wha? happen?’ There was my little daughter cheerfully talking to me—it almost seemed to me as if she knew God’s plan for her and was satisfied with it. I resolved inside my heart to give her my best and to make her life as joyful as I could.

One more chemo regimen was prescribed to blast this resistant leukemia from her body, even at the risk of damaging other organs. That was to be followed by a bone marrow transplant. Our son Christopher turned out to be a perfect match for the transplant. Our daughter Michelle was no match at all, but would have gladly given anything for her little sister.

The week of the transplant, which turned out to be the last week of Bethany’s life, is like a blur to me. I do recall Diana calling me as she did her utmost to help Bethany breathe and rest comfortably. When I arrived at the hospital after her call, I found Bethany sitting under an oxygen tent, and for the first time, she seemed to give up on life. When she was incubated—a tube inserted past her throat down into her lungs—the look on her face cried out silently for help. The tube caused her to cough and gasp for air, yet no sound could be heard because the lungs needed air to make a coughing noise. I also remember the sound of Diana crying out in her love, ‘Bethany, please don’t leave me,’ as Bethany slipped

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away from us. In the end, Bethany's little heart failed, like an athlete who had run far past his limit. All the clamor of the ICU room gave way to only the sound of our own moans and sobbing. The cries of our children as we told them Bethany would no longer walk with us here on earth are indelibly planted in our hearts.

Bethany's fight against leukemia had lasted sixteen months—from Christmas Day to Easter week.

Bethany left this world in much the same way she entered it—hooked up to tubes, wires, needles, respirators, monitors, and many attending hands and watchful eyes carefully monitoring her delicate life balances. For the greater part of her life, however, Bethany lived free of these things. We choose to remember how she lived more than how she died. She loved playing games and singing songs with her sister Michelle and brother Christopher. She was a fun little trickster who enjoyed books and gardening, coloring, and animals.

There were times throughout Bethany's life and illness that we asked God, 'What have we done? What haven't we done?' We felt ourselves grappling with the issue of sin and whether something we had done or failed to do had contributed to Bethany's illness. There are no answers to those questions, and we always came to the point of finding our faithfulness wanting and God's faithfulness increasing infinitely toward us.

Bethany now enjoys God face-to-face and is perfectly satisfied

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with the life that she lived on this earth for only four and a half years. We tell our children that Bethany took the fast track to heaven—a rocket ship to fly her journey. We are still on the wagon train of life. God alone decides the length of our journey and the speed at which we travel it. We encourage ourselves as a family that Bethany is in the presence of almighty God, with no pain or tears and no anxiety about missing us. She is no longer a four and a half year old, Down syndrome girl. She is whole, complete, and fully mature in the Lord! We have absolutely no doubt that we will see her again, even as we will see God and His Son, Jesus, face-to-face. It is only then that we will truly understand all of His purposes for Bethany's life, but we know this: Our praise to God will be for eternity that His wisdom and holiness are perfect.

Our struggles, of course, didn't end with Bethany's death. We still struggle to get through holidays without her. We still struggle with trying to understand what has happened in the weakness of our own logic. We still struggle with being submissive to God's plan and serving Him joyfully until the day He calls each of us home to Himself. Even so, if He asked us to go through this all again—knowing what we now know—we also know we would be willing to do so for the sake of knowing Him as we do today. He is a God of infinite grace, mercy, compassion, and peace.

The following is an excerpt from the eulogy Mark gave at Bethany's memorial service:

I believe Bethany was sent by our great God to teach us the

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character of His unconditional love ? To Bethany, things like Down syndrome, leukemia, chemotherapy, and bone marrow transplants were trivial. If you entered into her life—whether at home or in a hospital room—she would be overjoyed to greet you and equally enthusiastic when you left.

When we prayed, Bethany would have it no other way than for all of us to join hands. Her trust was great and she lived without regrets. When she felt she needed to repent, she would drop to the floor with her hands on her face.

Diana often sang with Bethany, "He who began a good work in you will be faithful to complete it." Bethany is now complete and full of purest joy. We can almost picture her singing praises to our holy God.

If Bethany could speak right now, I feel confident she may well say, 'Do not sorrow, for the joy of the Lord is your strength' (Neh. 8:10). (John MacArthur, *Safe in the Arms of God*, 24).

15. The reason why I read that is to illustrate that all children are a gift from God, whether they have medical issues or not.
16. God has a purpose and destiny for every person.
17. Whether it for 4 years, 80 years, or a few moments in one day.
18. God's purpose for Grace's life is no different.

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19. I know there have been a lot of questions surrounding this situation.
20. One of them is “How can we minister to Richard and Emily?”— “We don’t know what to do!”
21. I hope from our study tonight, many questions will be answered and you will discover how you can minister them.
22. In addressing these questions, I want to begin our study in Psalm 139 as we take a look at verses 1-18.
23. Read **Psalm 139:1-18**.
24. Psalm 127:3 (NASB) says “Behold, children are a gift of the Lord, The fruit of the womb is a reward.”
25. “Children are a gift of the Lord” and therefore it is God who gives life or who takes it.
26. He is the One who opens or closes the womb.
27. **Genesis 29:31 (NASB)** says, “Now the Lord saw that Leah was unloved, and He opened her womb, but Rachel was barren.”
28. **Genesis 30:1-2 (NASB)** says, “Now when Rachel saw that she bore Jacob no children, she became jealous of her sister; and she said to Jacob, “Give me children, or else I die.” 2 Then Jacob's anger burned against Rachel, and he said, "Am I

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in the place of God, who has withheld from you the fruit of the womb?"

29. **Verses 22-23** says, "Then God remembered Rachel, and **God gave heed to her and opened her womb.** 23 So she conceived and bore a son and said, "God has taken away my reproach."
30. **Deuteronomy 32:39 (NASB)** sums it up by God saying to Israel, "See now that I, I am He, And there is no god besides Me; **It is I who put to death and give life.** I have wounded and it is I who heal, And there is no one who can deliver from My hand."
31. The same is true with Richard and Emily.
32. God opened Emily's womb to conceive a child.
33. He allowed her to carry her for 34 weeks.
34. He allowed Grace to be born alive.
35. He then took Grace to Himself.
36. Is that unloving as some would accuse?
37. No that is mercy!
38. We read from **Job 3** tonight where Job says it would have been better for him not to have been born "like a miscarriage which is discarded" or as "infants that never saw light" (**v.16**)

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than to experience the trouble of this life.

39. Solomon asked in **Ecclesiastes 6:3-5 (NASB)**, “If a man fathers a hundred children and lives many years, however many they be, but his soul is not satisfied with good things and he does not even have a proper burial, then I say, **“Better the miscarriage than he,** 4 for it comes in futility and goes into obscurity; and its name is covered in obscurity. 5 “It never sees the sun and it never knows anything; **it is better off than he.**”
40. As we consider this subject, we need to first understand *all children are precious to God.*

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I. All Children Are Precious to God (Ps.139, NASB)

David says in **verse 17**, “How precious also are Your thoughts to me, O God! How vast is the sum of them!”

A. God is Intimately Acquainted with All Their Ways (vv.1-4)

1. David begins verse 1 by saying that God has “searched” him

This was a penetrating search. The word David uses for “Search” (chaqar), originally meant “‘to dig’—a word applied to the search for precious metals” (KJV Bible Commentary). David is literally saying, “You have dug deep in me” (Barclay).

“David said God’s knowledge came as if He had scoured every detail of [his] life” (Bible Knowledge Commentary).

Charles Spurgeon writes, “The Lord knows us as thoroughly as if He had examined us minutely, and had pried into the most secret corners of our being” (The Treasury of David).

- a) **Psalm 44:21 (NASB)** For He knows the secrets of the heart.
- b) David told Solomon in **1 Chronicles 28:9**

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(NASB) that “the Lord searches all hearts, and understands every intent of the thoughts.”

2. David continues in Psalm 139:1 by also saying God has “known” him
 - a) This is a general statement referring to God having *searched* him
 - b) If He searched or dug deep inside of him He certainly knew him.

Jeremiah made a statement like this when he said in Jeremiah 1:5, “Before I formed you in the womb I knew you.”

3. In vv.2-3 David specifically states how God knew him
 - a) God knew all of his actions (v.2a)

“You know when I sit down and when I rise up.”

“The Lord (You is emphatic in Heb.; cf. v. 13) knew every move he made; the two opposites of sitting and rising represent all his actions (this is a figure of speech known as a merism; cf. vv. 3, 8)” (The Bible Knowledge Commentary).

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Job said, “Does He not see my ways And number all my steps?” (**Job 31:4, NASB**)

Charles Spurgeon said, “Me thou knowest, and all that comes of me. My most common and casual acts, my most needful and necessary movements, are noted by thee, and thou knowest the inward thoughts which regulate them. Whether I sink in lowly self-renunciation, or ascend in pride, thou seest the motions of my mind, as well as those of my body. Sitting down to consider, or rising up to act, we are still seen, known, and read by our Lord” (The Treasury of David).

- b) God knew all of his thoughts (v.2b)

“You understand my thought from afar.”

He knew his thoughts as **Psalm 94:11 (NASB)** says, The Lord knows the thoughts of man, That they are a mere breath.

- c) God knew the direction of his life (v.3)

“You scrutinize my path and my lying down. And are intimately acquainted with all my ways.”

“Scrutinize” (zarah) means to winnow” (Calvin)

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and “is a picture of winnowing grain”
(Wiersbe).

Winnowing was the process of removing chaff from grain. They would throw it up by a shovel against the wind.

So the verse could read, “You winnow my path.”

In other words He judges our active life and our quiet life—“my lying down.”

William Barclay says of this verse, “You sift all my actions, putting them through a sieve, as it were, so as to discover every detail about them, what has motivated them, what effect they have upon me and upon others, in fact, everything conceivable about them (verse 3). In a word, God’s action in his search for the real ‘me’ is like winnowing through a whole load of wheat in search of, say, just one pin” (The Daily study Bible series, Vol.2, 320).

4. In vv.4-6 David is astounded at God’s intimate knowledge of him

He says, “Even before there is a word on my tongue, Behold, O Lord, You know it all. 5 You have enclosed me behind and before, And laid Your hand

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upon me. 6 Such knowledge is too wonderful for me; It is too high, I cannot attain to it.”

“God knows what we are about to say before the words are formed on our tongue” (John Calvin, Calvin's Commentaries: Psalms).

He has “enclosed us” and “laid His hand” upon us. We are firmly and fully within His grasp every moment of our existence.

God is completely in control of our lives!

This was too much for David to comprehend! “Such knowledge is too wonderful for me; it is too high, I cannot attain to it” (v.6)

- a) David said in **Psalm 40:5 (NASB)**, “Many, O Lord my God, are the wonders which You have done, And Your thoughts toward us; There is none to compare with You. If I would declare and speak of them, They would be too numerous to count.”
- b) Paul made a similar statement in **Romans 11:33 (NASB)** when he said, “Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments and unfathomable His ways!”

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- c) Job's response to God's "Who is this who darkens counsel by words without knowledge?" in Job 38:1 is found in **Job 42:1-3 (NASB)**:

Then Job answered the Lord and said, 2 "I know that You can do all things, And that no purpose of Yours can be thwarted. 3 'Who is this that hides counsel without knowledge?' "Therefore I have declared that which I did not understand, Things too wonderful for me, which I did not know."

Look at verses 13-17 and notice a second way in which children are precious to God.

B. God Personally Fashions Each One in the Womb (vv.13-17)

1. David says, "God created me" (v.13a).

"For You formed"

The Hebrew word "formed" (qanah), can mean "to get, acquire, create or buy."

This was a common Semitic word found in both ancient and modern Hebrew as well as in ancient Akkadian and Ugaritic.

It occurs in the Old Testament 84 times.

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The first occurrence is in Gen. 4:1 where Eve says after the birth of Cain, “I have gotten a man from the LORD.”

In this passage, qanah expresses a basic meaning of God’s “creating” or “bringing into being,” so Eve is really saying, “I have created a man-child with the help of the Lord.” This meaning is confirmed in Gen. 14:19, 22 where both verses refer to God as “creator of heaven and earth” (KJV, NASB, “possessor”; RSV, “maker”).

In Deut. 32:6, God is called the “father” who “created” Israel; a father begets or “creates,” rather than “acquires” children. In the Wisdom version of the Creation story (Prov. 8:22-36), Wisdom herself states that “the Lord created me at the beginning of his work” (RSV, NEB, JB, TEV). “Possessed” (KJV, NASB) is surely not as appropriate in such a context.

When the Psalmist says to God, “For You have formed my inward parts” (Ps. 139:13, RSV) he surely meant “create” (JB).

Qanah is used several times to express God’s redeeming activity in behalf of Israel, again reflecting “creativity” rather than “purchase.” Exod. 15:16 is better translated, “... Thy people ... whom thou hast created,” rather than “thou hast purchased” (RSV). See also Ps. 74:2; 78:54.

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The meaning “to buy” is expressed by qanah frequently in contexts where one person makes a purchase agreement with another. The word is used to refer to “buying” a slave (Exod. 21:2) and land (Gen. 47:20) (W.E. Vine, Vine’s Complete Expository Dictionary of Old and New Testament Words).

- a) God said to Jeremiah, “Before ***I formed you in the womb*** I knew you, And before you were born I consecrated you; I have appointed you a prophet to the nations.” (Jer.1:5, NASB).

- b) **Job 31:15 (NASB)** beautifully says, “Did not ***He who made me in the womb*** make him, And ***the same one fashion us in the womb?***”

“In a speck of watery material smaller than the dot over [the letter] i, all the future characteristics of the child are programmed ‘the color of his skin, eyes and hair, the shape of his facial features, the natural abilities he will have. All that the child will be physically and mentally is contained in germ form in that fertilized egg. From it will develop: ... 60 trillion cells, 100 thousand miles of nerve fiber, 60 thousand miles of vessels carrying blood around the body, 250 bones, to say nothing of joints, ligaments and muscles’” (MacDonald, W., & Farstad, A. (1997, c1995). Believer's Bible Commentary:Old and New Testaments, Ps 139:13).

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2. David continues by saying that God created “my inward parts” (v.13b).

“Inward parts” is the Hebrew word kilyah and it means “kidney” referring to they physical organs.

This word was also “regarded by the Hebrews as the seat of sensation and feeling as well as desiring and longing” (KJV Bible Commentary).

God not only created everything inside of his body but also his emotions and desires.

3. He continues further in **verse 13** by stating where all this took place

“You wove me in my mother's womb.”

“Wove” Heb.sakak, “to weave together or knit together (Barnes) meaning that God put his parts together as one who weaves cloth, or who makes a basket. The weaving of the bones, tissue, and organs” (KJV Bible Commentary).

William MacDonald says, “Think of the brain, for instance, with its capacity for recording facts, sounds, odors, sights, touch, pain; with its ability to recall; with its power to make computations; with its seemingly endless flair for making decisions and solving problems. And God knit us together in our

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mother's womb. This aptly describes the marvelous weaving of the muscles, sinews, ligaments, nerves, blood vessels and bones of the human frame" (Believer's Bible Commentary: Old and New Testaments, Ps 139:13).

4. Before he continues in attributing his creation to God's power he praises God in **verse 14**

"I will give thanks to You, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made; Wonderful are Your works, And my soul knows it very well."

5. In **verse 15** David says that God created my skeletal structure

"My frame was not hidden from You, When I was made in secret, And skillfully wrought in the depths of the earth."

"Frame" Heb.otsem, "bones"

"Made in secret, and...in the depths of the earth" also refers to the womb.

6. **Verse 16** continues by saying "Your eyes have seen my unformed substance; And in Your book were all written The days that were ordained for me, When as yet there was not one of them."

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“Substance” Heb.golem, “an embryo, unformed substance”

Here we also see the predetermined thought of God in our creation when he says, “And in Your book were all written The days that were ordained for me, When as yet there was not one of them.”

The creation of man as seen in this passage is not the same as the creation of the first man and woman. The first man was a direct creation of God from the dust of the earth.

The creation of the first woman was from the rib of man and both of them were created as full grown adults.

Here David is referring to “God’s sovereign superintendence over the natural process of reproduction” (Walvoord).

7. The only response David could have at this wonder of the power of God is found in **verses 17-18**

He says, “How precious also are Your thoughts to me, O God! How vast is the sum of them! 18 If I should count them, they would outnumber the sand. When I awake, I am still with You.”

The fact that God goes to so much detail in His

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creation shows Him to be a gracious loving Creator not a tyrant and reveals how precious children are to God.

When **Psalm 127:3 (NASB)** says, “Behold, children are a gift of the Lord, The fruit of the womb is a reward” we see perfectly what He means by this passage in Psalm 139.

With all that takes place from the moment the sperm fertilizes the egg, to the forming of every detail of that baby, God is in control!

Even the “successful birth of any child is regarded in the Scriptures as an act authorized by God. In the psalms we also find these words of David:

But You are He who took Me out of the womb; You made Me trust while on My mother’s breasts. I was cast upon You from birth. From My mother’s womb You have been My God. **(Ps. 22:9-10 NKJV)**

The decision about whether a baby lives or dies is God’s decision. He allows conception. He allows birth. He also allows death at birth. He allows what is in keeping with His purposes. No death or life occurs apart from the purposes of God.

God is actively involved in every feature of every life, including whether a child is born or dies in the

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womb, and whether a child lives past birth or dies at birth” (John MacArthur, *Safe in the Arms of God*, 17).

Let me make a few more observations before we close, not only are all children precious to God but...

II. All Children Are Innocent Before God

What do I mean by “innocent?”

To understand this we must first see that the Bible states very clearly that...

A. All Children Are Born as Sinners from Conception

1. David said in **Psalm 51:5 (NASB)** Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity, And *in sin my mother conceived me.*
2. **Psalm 58:3 (NASB)** says, “The wicked are estranged *from the womb*; These who speak lies *go astray from birth.*”
3. God says of Israel in **Isaiah 48:8 (NASB)** says, “You have not heard, you have not known. Even from long ago your ear has not been open, Because I knew that you would deal very treacherously; *And you have been called a rebel from birth.*”

What Happens to Babies Who Die?

Psalm 139:1-18

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“The principle of iniquity is embedded in the heart of every human being. Every person is born morally corrupt and born with an irresistible bent toward evil.

When Scripture refers to infants as ‘innocent,’ it does not mean they are untainted by the fallenness or guilt we all inherit from Adam.

If infants were not sinful or morally corrupt, they would not die at all! If babies were born totally without sin or depravity, there could be no reason for their death.

The Bible says very clearly, “The wages of *sin* is death, but the gift of God is eternal life” (Romans 6:23, emphasis added).

Sin is the killer, the destroyer of life. The very fact that babies die at all bears evidence to the truth that sin is present in them—the disease of an inherited sin nature has within it the seeds of death” (Ibid., MacArthur, 69-70).

But we must also understand that...

- B. All Children Are Owned By God and Considered Innocent Until He Determines the Age and Condition of Accountability

Consider this first statement...

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1. All children are “owned” by God

In Ezekiel 16 God lays full claim to these innocent sons and daughters who are sacrificed to false gods.

He says in verses 20-22, “Moreover, you took your sons and daughters whom you had borne to Me and sacrificed them to idols to be devoured. Were your harlotries so small a matter? 21 "You slaughtered My children and offered them up to idols by causing them to pass through the fire. 22 "Besides all your abominations and harlotries you did not remember the days of your youth, when you were naked and bare and squirming in your blood.

God says these children were “borne to” Him and they are His children (“My children”). He exerts full ownership over the innocent ones.

He even refers to them as “innocent” ones in Jeremiah 2:34 and 19:4.

Yes, all children are born as sinners at conception but they are “not culpable in the same sense as those whose sins are willful and premeditated” (Ibid., MacArthur, 35).

Babies have no willful rebellion or unbelief. They have no suppression of truth. They are no understanding of sin’s impact or consequences.

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You may ask, “At what *age* do they cease being *innocent*?”

Or as some have phrased it, “What is the age of accountability?”

Scripture does not give any particular *age* but it does give the *condition* of accountability.

There is no one age at which *every* person suddenly becomes accountable for knowing the difference between sin and righteousness, judgment and forgiveness, and understanding the gospel.

All children are unique in their development and exposure to the truth.

There is no one age in the Bible at which all children are declared to be ‘accountable.’

Neither is there one chronological age in a person’s life in which a person suddenly and automatically knows right from wrong or is capable of understanding God’s plan for salvation.

The *condition* of accountability is what matters.

Every infant or child who dies before reaching a condition of moral culpability goes instantly to heaven at death.

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That leads me to the second part of the statement.

2. God determines the age and condition of accountability
 - a) At what age does God cause a child to be accountable?
 - b) Again there is no specific age given.
 - c) Jesus was 12 years old when He had come to full understanding of His divine nature and His personal mission.

When He told Joseph and Mary who had been looking for Him, “I must be about My Father’s business,” He was informing them, at the age of twelve, of His full awareness of the realities of His life as the Son of God.

3. 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.

A miscarried or aborted baby has no understanding of law and grace, sin and salvation.

Neither does a baby who dies at birth or shortly thereafter. Neither does an infant. Neither does a

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toddler or young child—or even an older child, in some cases.

At some point in a child's maturation, he or she comes to have an understanding of law and grace.

In other words, the child begins to comprehend and understand these principles: God has rules and commandments; sin involves the violation or breaking of God's laws; forgiveness of sin has been made possible through the death of Jesus Christ on the cross; the grace of God allows for all who believe in and receive Jesus Christ as their Savior and submit to Him as Lord to be cleansed of their sin and live in the newness of life and joyful obedience to Him.

From child to child, that precise age varies. It is the 'condition' that counts, not a calendar.

Some children, of course, never reach such a level of maturation.

They are mentally impaired to the point that they are forever locked into thinking as a young child thinks—we might say they 'have the mind of a five-year-old' or they are 'like a child' in their mental capacities related to reasoning, remembering, or making moral choices. Their bodies may mature fully, but their minds do not. These, too, are 'children' who may never reach a condition of moral

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culpability” (Ibid., MacArthur, 37).

III. All Innocent Children Who Die Are Elect

A. They Are Saved By Grace

It is not an easy thing to think of babies as sinners, but it is true.

The good news, however, is that babies who die are saved. And they are saved by the only means that anyone is saved: *God's grace*.

Fallen, sinful, guilty and depraved children who die with no spiritual merit—no personal, moral, or religious merit—are welcomed by God into glory. On what basis? Solely by God's *grace*!

How were you or any other person saved? By law? Or by grace? None of us had any more to do with regard to the accomplishment of our own salvation than the youngest and most helpless infant. We all have been saved by *grace*.

Jesus said, “Unless you are converted and become as little children, you will by no means enter the kingdom of heaven” (Matt. 18:3).

None of us are capable of saving our own souls. We each must come as a little child—totally dependent upon

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God's grace—if we are to receive the free gift of mercy and forgiveness made possible by the death of Jesus Christ.

The apostle Paul said very clearly, “For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast” (Eph. 2:8–9) (Ibid., MacArthur, 74-76).

B. They Are Immediately with Jesus

1. **2 Samuel 12:16-23 (NASB)**

“Here is the confidence that there is a future reunion after death, which includes infants who have died being reunited with saints who die” (John Jr MacArthur, The MacArthur Study Bible, 2 Sa 12:23).

2. **2 Samuel 18:33 (NASB)**

David didn't have this same hope for Absalom. After the news of his death, 2 Samuel 18:33 (NASB) says, “The king was deeply moved and went up to the chamber over the gate and wept. And thus he said as he walked, “O my son Absalom, my son, my son Absalom! Would I had died instead of you, O Absalom, my son, my son!”

IV. How Do We Minister to Those Who Are Grieving?

A. Pray

B. Comfort

1. By your presence
2. By comforting with God's Word (1 Thess.4:13-18; 2 Sam.12:19)

C. Assist

Don't just say "If you need me," suggest how you can help. Take the initiative. Cook meals for them. Go to the store. Run errands.

D. Return

Some of the hardest days are *after* the funeral. The grieving continues. Being consistent to be there is a help to anyone who is hurting, grieving, or struggling.

CONCLUSION

1. I hope what we have looked at tonight has answered many of your questions and that you will be understanding, compassionate, and biblically informed as to what Scripture says.

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2. Also that you will remember it is the Scripture that gives hope—the power lies in the written Word.
3. David said in Psalm 119:50 (NASB), “This is my *comfort in my affliction, That Your word* has revived me.”
4. The only way to give comfort from God’s Word is to receive it yourself.
5. Paul said in **2 Corinthians 1:3-4 (NASB)**, “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and *God of all comfort, 4 who comforts us in all our affliction so that we will be able to comfort those who are in any affliction with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God.*”
6. God’s comfort is available tonight.
7. All you have to do is ask.
8. Have you been saved? Have you been born again? Have you been forgiven of all your sin?
9. Have you surrendered your life to Jesus Christ?
10. As we partake of the Lord’s Supper tonight, remember this is why He died and resurrected—for our sins!
11. Let’s pray. (Lord’s Supper).