

INFANT SALVATION

Are all those who die in infancy saved?

INTRODUCTION

1. This is a subject on which the Bible does not speak directly - only indirectly or inferentially.
2. It was a great issue for Christians in the 19th century (and even before) when infant mortality was high.
3. The subject relates to the spiritual state of aborted embryos, and those dying through miscarriages, cot deaths, accident and murder.

Roman Catholics and Anglo-Catholics believing in baptismal regeneration teach that unbaptised infants are lost. Thus they are not buried in consecrated ground. Many Presbyterians (who practise covenant paedobaptism) and most Baptists - including C. H. Spurgeon - have taught that all dying infants are saved. Some Westminster Confession adherents and Strict Baptists limit infant salvation to 'elect infants' only, suggesting that other dying infants are not elect.

BRIEF BIBLICAL SURVEY

The all important consideration is God's disposition towards children in general. On this matter, the Scriptures leave us in no doubt.

1. See *Deuteronomy 1: 39*.

a. Clearly, the children of the rebellious Israelites were not penalised on account of their parents' sin. They were too young to have knowledge of good and evil and, unlike their parents, would be permitted to enter the Promised Land.

b. The Promised Land which the children would inherit was typical of God's eternal kingdom (see *Hebrews 11: 13-16*).

2. See *2 Samuel 12: 23*. Since David believed in the reality of the heavenly afterlife, his words would make no sense if the dead child was not safe in heaven. Compare this with David's despairing cry over his rebellious son Absalom's death in *2 Samuel 18: 33*. The Cushite's report of Absalom's death offers no hope for the dead rebel (see v. 32).

3. See *2 Kings 4: 26*. Concerning the dead child of the Shunammite woman, the mother affirmed - in answer to Gehazi's question, "Is it well with the child?" - that 'it is well'. The inference is obvious. In its dead condition, there was nothing to fear in respect of the child's eternal welfare. Interestingly, no mention is made of the child's circumcision, the sign of its Israelite status and gracious acceptance by God.

4. See *Ezekiel 16: 21*. During Israel's wicked and idolatrous apostasy,

children were sacrificed by fire to the ancient pagan Canaanite deity Moloch. God calls the sacrificed little ones 'my children'. They were evidently safe with Him despite the sins of the parents.

5. See *Jonah 4: 11*. God showed particular compassion towards the little ones of wicked Nineveh. Significantly, God was 'gracious and merciful..., slow to anger and abundant in loving-kindness' (v. 2) towards Gentile children. Being outside the covenant circumcised people of Israel was no barrier to their salvation.

6. See *Jeremiah 31: 15-17* and *Matthew 2: 18*. There is every reason to believe that the children killed by Herod's men were as eternally safe as those sacrificed to Moloch (see #4 above). We may surely say of such victims that 'the children shall come back', as Jeremiah was careful to say (see *Jer. 31: 17*). Notwithstanding the parents' grief, their children's position was not hopeless however horrific their death was.

7. See *Mark 10: 13-16*, *Matthew 18: 1-6* and *21: 15-16*. The loving view of little children expressed by our Lord Jesus Christ is beautifully consistent with the Old Testament - as one would expect! They are eternally safe in the Saviour's loving arms.

THE SALVATION OF INFANTS

The basis of their salvation is the same for adults, i.e. by God's free, unmerited grace and favour alone (see *Ephesians 2: 8*).

a. Their salvation is not based on their supposed absolute innocency (since all fell in Adam, see *Romans 5: 12ff*). Infants are potentially disposed to sin even if they are not actually sinners by conscious acts. According to the Bible, eternal damnation is based on actual sin, unbelief and disobedience. Significantly, in the proceedings of the Day of Judgement (see *Matthew 25: 41-6*), adults rather than children will be declared accursed.

b. God is both just and merciful. None are consigned to hell unjustly. Thus, in view of the evidence cited above, infants must be numbered among the saved. This is not to deny the necessity of spiritual regeneration or 'new birth' (see *John 3: 3*). While older children and adults are 'born again' through hearing and believing the Word of God (see *Romans 10: 14; James 1: 18*), God is able to act directly on those incapable of responding to God's saving truth. In short, regeneration can occur in the womb. Clearly, Jeremiah and John the Baptist are examples of this (see *Jeremiah 1: 5* and *Luke 1: 44*). Last but by no means least, if God's kindness extends to animals and birds, we dare not imagine infants are less kindly regarded (see *Matthew 10: 29-31*).

Query: At what age does this comforting teaching cease to apply?

Answer: This is difficult to answer precisely. Since Jewish children did not come 'under the Law' until their twelfth year, a case may be made that they are treated mercifully by God up until that age. However, no rigid answer is possible. We must leave this to God's judgement which is never unjust.

CONCLUSION

1. The Baptist C. H. Spurgeon and the Presbyterian Charles Hodge believed that since the saved are a 'great multitude which no one could number' (*Rev. 7: 9*), this must include infants many of whom have died throughout human history. On the analogy that the prison population is much smaller than the general population, it is argued that more are saved than lost. This must also include children dying in infancy.

2. This teaching arguably applies to children dying in every circumstance - abortions, miscarriages, cot deaths, etc. When conjoined twins are separated leading to the death of one of them, the dying child is surely embraced by God's merciful kindness.

3. Parents may therefore be comforted in such situations. However, they themselves must repent and believe the Gospel (see *John 3: 16* and *Acts 2: 38*) if they wish to see their little ones in heaven. Parents who have aborted their God-given children for any other reason than preserving the mother's life must repent of such sin and seek God's forgiveness. While the aborted child is safe in heaven, adults are only safe by believing the Gospel. When abortion is recommended on medical grounds to preserve the mother's life, parents need not be troubled by guilt. Naturally they will be sad but no sin is involved, and the little one is safe. However, while the child is saved, parents will be lost if they reject the message of Christ.

4. While the act of infant baptism does not itself save a child, the Reformed doctrine of infant baptism is more consistent with God's loving care towards children than the Baptist view (see *Acts 2: 39*; *1 Corinthians 7: 14*). However, while it assures parents of God's kindness for their offspring, infant salvation is not itself dependent on baptism. That said, readers might be interested to know that the present writer was persuaded of the truth of infant salvation with the aid of Spurgeon's article on the subject! See the reprint in *The Sword and Trowel*, 1988, number 1, pp. 15-18.

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