

Q: What happens to infants who die before they are old enough to understand and believe the gospel?

A: If such infants are saved, it cannot be on their own merits, righteousness or innocence, but it must be entirely on the basis of Christ's redemptive work and regeneration by the work of the Holy Spirit within them. "There is one God, and there is one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus" (1 Tim. 2:5). "Unless one is born anew, he cannot see the kingdom of God" (John 3:3).

Yet God can certainly bring regeneration (that is, new spiritual life) to an infant even before he or she is born. This was true of John the Baptist, for the angel Gabriel, before John was born, said, "He will be filled with the Holy Spirit, *even from his mother's womb*" (Luke 1:15). We might say that John the Baptist was "born again" before he was born!

There is a similar example in Psalm 22:10: David says, "Since my mother bore me you have been my God."

It is clear, therefore, that God is able to save infants in an unusual way, apart from their hearing and understanding the gospel, by bringing regeneration to them very early, sometimes even before birth. This regeneration is probably also followed at once by a nascent, intuitive awareness of God and trust in Him at an extremely early age, but this is something we simply cannot understand well. One analogy to such trust, however, is the instinctive trust that infants have for their mothers. Studies show that they also learn to recognize both their mother's and father's voices while still in the womb.

We must, however, affirm clearly that this is not the usual way for God to save people. Salvation usually occurs when someone hears and understands the gospel and then places trust in Christ. But in unusual cases like John the Baptist, God brought salvation before this understanding. This leads us to conclude that it certainly is possible that God would also do this where He knows the infant will die before hearing the gospel.

This teaching should be especially encouraging to Christian believers whose infants die in infancy, for several passages of Scripture show that it is a frequent pattern of God to save the children of those who believe in Him (see Gen. 7:1; cf. Heb. 11:7; Josh. 2:18; Ps. 103:17; John 4:53; Acts 2:39; 16:31; 18:8; 1 Cor. 1:16; 7:14; Titus 1:6).

Particularly relevant here is the case of the first child Bathsheba bore to King David. When the infant child had died, David said, "I shall go to him but he will not return to me" (2 Sam. 12:23). David, who through his life had such great confidence that he would live forever in the Lord's presence (see Ps. 23:6, and many of David's psalms), also had confidence that he would see his infant son again when he died. David does not simply say, "I will go where he is," but his words specify that he expects personal reunion and fellowship: "I will go to him." David is convinced that he will be with his son in the presence of the Lord forever. And at any age, salvation is

always because of His mercy, not because of our merits (see Rom. 9:14–18).



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