

Is My Baby with God?

Biblical Truths About the Death of a Child

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PERSPECTIVE

For those of you reading this who have lost a child before or after birth, I am deeply sorry. My heart mourns with yours. It is a loss of hopes and dreams for your future together.

When our dear ones ask if their baby is with God, I always reply with honesty and compassion, "YES." My answer is based on the Biblical Worldview on the death and eternal estate of a child.

This will not be a waste of the reader's time by being "churchy," or by doing a theological deep-dive, or by writing the often unintended but hurtful clichés to which surviving family members can be subjected: "*Heaven is now a better place;*" "*All things work together for good...;*" and the long list of "*Well, at least...*" comments; and others wanting to "*There-there*" you with quick, impulsive answers. These unhelpful and even potentially hurtful comments are attempts to "fix" those who are not broken but grieving. I sincerely wish to give hope to family members interested in what God has revealed regarding this real and painful subject, on which you are the only expert of your unique journey.

The Bible is authoritative and reliable in its instruction on all life matters. For example, it has been correctly stated that Creation was not a scientific event but a supernatural event. Only one eyewitness revealed the event to us. Science only constructs and tests models in the laboratory. Creation, a one-time supernatural event, cannot be reconstructed and analyzed in a laboratory. All that science can tell us about the Creation Event (aka The Big Bang), the beginning of time and space (matter), is that something came from nothing, and it didn't do it by itself. It cannot tell us much more. Without God's revelation, it would be an unanswerable mystery.

The Bible is authoritative and reliable regarding what happens to our baby, para-natal and post-natal, and children taken by *death* way too soon in *life*.

Relationship with God

Before I formed you in the womb I knew you. Jeremiah 1:5a.

To paraphrase, "*Before giving you life at conception, I knew you.*" God planned his everlasting relationship with Jeremiah before he was formed in his mother's womb.

Having experienced losing a child, King David reveals the inescapable relational character of God to his creation, even before conception. This is the ever-present relationship God also has with your child.

Where shall I go from your Spirit? Or where shall I flee from your presence?

If I ascend to heaven, you are there! If I make my bed in Sheol [the grave], you are there!

If I take the wings of the morning and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea, even there your hand shall lead me, and your right hand shall hold me.

If I say, "Surely the darkness shall cover me, and the light about me be night," even the darkness is not dark to you; the night is bright as the day, for darkness is as light with you.

For you formed my inward parts; you knitted me together in my mother's womb. I praise you, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made. Wonderful are your works; my soul knows it very well.

My frame was not hidden from you, when I was being made in secret, intricately woven in the depths of the earth.

Your eyes saw 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. Psalm 139:7-16

BABY GREGORY

Our friend and teacher, Dr. Tracy Elder, is Founder and President of the International Alliance of Community Chaplains (I.A.O.C.C.). In her autobiography *CLIMB EVERY MOUNTAIN: A Chaplain's Story*, Chaplain Tracy talks about meeting a young woman, Jade, who was pregnant, very poor, and living with her boyfriend, Jeff. Tracy could tell that Jade and Jeff were struggling financially and with life. Tracy recalls, "*They had nothing. I mean nothing.*"

Along with several friends from church, Tracy wanted to arrange a baby shower for Jade so they could give her baby formula, diapers, and medicine. She asked the senior pastor's permission to use the church and purchase the gifts with church funds. The senior pastor said, "*No. Absolutely not. If you do it for one you'll have to do it for all. No, we're not going to spend church money on the unsaved world,*" he said sternly.

Understandably, this raised her ire. So, Tracy held the baby shower in her small, modest home, and showered Jade with much needed gifts, baby supplies, and the ladies' commitments to be available to Jade for anything.

Tracy and her prayer team made sure Jade made it to doctor appointments while Jeff was at work, and that the family's basic needs were met. Up to the time of delivery, Tracy and her prayer team experienced a season of joy and hope for Jade, Jeff, and their unborn baby.

This was all to be dashed by a late-night phone call Tracy received from her friend, May, who reported sadly that the baby died and had to be delivered stillborn.

Devastated, Tracy drove to the hospital and rushed to the front desk. Breathlessly, she inquired, "*I'm Chaplain Tracy here for Jade. Can you please tell me what room she is in?*" "*I'm glad you're here,*" the nurse said, handing Tracy a box. "*She's in room 312.*" Tracy, already shaken and feeling stupid, asked the nurse, "*What is this?*" The nurse said, "*She registered Catholic, so that's what you will need.*" The box contained anointing oil, holy water, and laminated prayer cards.

Tracy asked, "*So there's no priest coming, or a nun?*" The nurse replied, "*No, they aren't married, and they aren't members of the local diocese. I'm heading back to the room now, and I will let them know you are here.*" With that said, the nurse headed down the hall.

Tracy felt the same mounting frustration she did when she had been rejected by the senior pastor over the baby shower. She realized there was something rotten running down through the core of denominational religion. She knew Jesus would not have turned Jade away.

Making her way to the room, Tracy asked God, *"Why do you have me here? What am I supposed to say to Jade and her family?"* She told him, *"I can't do this. I'm sorry. I am the weakest link, and I am afraid."* When entering the brightly lit room, she didn't know what to say to Jade or her family, some laughing and some sobbing. But she knew it would be better to honor the awkward silence than to give bumper sticker theological answers so useless and unhelpful at such a time of deep grief and loss.

Tracy entered the room and walked up behind Jeff seated at Jade's bedside and in an emotionally fragile state. Tracy reached out and touched Jeff's shoulder, but he could not speak. She then leaned over the bedrail and saw Jade sitting up smiling with tears streaming down her face. Tracy thought to herself, *"What is that? Oh God, I don't understand. Help me?"*

Tracy leaned in and kissed Jade on the cheek. Held in Jade's arms was the most beautiful, perfect baby boy; and he was dead. Tracy was in awe by the sight of him. *"Oh Jade, he's beautiful, she said."*

Jade cuddled her son, staring intensely at his face, committing his every line and feature to memory for the rest of her life. Mom knew she didn't have long.

Jeff stood up, visibly shaking, and moving from foot to foot. He was staring too, from his baby boy's beautiful face to that of his beloved Jade. Tracy reached behind Jade to the box and pulled out a laminated card. She stood up and said to everyone, *"If it's okay, I would like to get started."* As the family gathered around, Jeff seemed to grow calmer. Tracy looked at the card and noticed it read, *"Naming Ceremony."*

She quietly thanked God for how the box was put together, and how everything was outlined. She read the card and followed it step by step. She prayed the prayer and read the scriptures provided. At one point she was instructed to take the infant from his mother and place him in his father's arms for naming. As Tracy picked up the child and cradled him in her arms, she could feel his weight, his substance. She gazed at him too, memorizing every line and feature. She finished anointing his head with oil and handed him to his father. Jeff held him as if he was the most precious thing in the world, and he was. Jeff's large, rough hands encompassed his son in a father's protective embrace. He held him close to his chest and kissed him on his cheek.

With her voice crackling with joy and emotion, Tracy asked, *"What do you want to name your son, Jeff?"*

"Gregory Aaron," Jeff replied. His voice was strong and clear. Equally strong and clear, Tracy declared, *"So shall he be named on earth and in heaven received of the Father, Gregory Aaron."* She took baby Gregory back in her arms, sprinkled him with water, and returned him to his mother. Tracy recalled later saying, *"And like a coward...I fled the room."*

There were more cards and more rituals to be done, but she couldn't do them. Overwhelmed with grief, she quickly left the room and ran down the hall.

From behind her, she heard Jeff yell her name, *"TRACY!"* It came to her mind that Jeff knew she didn't do it right and he's going to kill her now. Tracy turned to see Jeff bounding toward her, reaching out. Tracy was terrified; yet sobbing and shaking, Jeff wrapped her in a big warm bear

hug while she tried to hold up both. Jeff pulled back and grasped Tracy by her shoulders, shouting, "TELL ME! TELL ME!"

Tracy asked frantically, "Tell you what, Jeff? Tell you what?"

Sobbing and hugging her, he replied, "Tell me how I can get a hold of God so I can see my son again! Tell me what I must do!"

At this moment, Tracy understood how this little child did more in his brief time on this earth than most of us do in our Christian walk in a lifetime. Baby Gregory led his father to the knowledge of God. 'And this I can do. I can show Jeff the way to see his son again,' Tracy thought.

Both went down on their knees in the hallway, and Tracy explained eternal salvation through Christ's work on the cross and led Jeff through a prayer to God. A few days after the funeral, Tracy had the privilege also to lead Jade to the Lord. Later, she married them in the light of God, and has now celebrated the births of their healthy, happy children. Still remembered, Baby Gregory is spoken of as a testimony of the power of God to save, redeem, reunite, and heal.

When a nice young man approached me [Merle] and wanted to have a lasting relationship with our adult daughter, I explained he had to go to God to get the girl. Jeff and Jade went to God to get the everlasting relationship with their son, Gregory.

Identity with God

He determines the number of the stars; he gives to all of them their names. Psalm 147:4

With 100 billion galaxies, each having 100 billion stars, and each star having been given a unique name by its Creator and Sustainer, the pre-incarnate Jesus Christ – God (John 1:1–3; Colossians 1:17), your baby has a unique and eternal name also given by God and Creator.

And I [Jesus Christ] will give him a white stone, with a new name written on the stone that no one knows except the one who receives it. Revelation 2:17

David Guzik writes:

In the ancient world, the use of a white stone had many associations. A white stone could be a ticket to a banquet, a sign of friendship, evidence of having been counted...Jesus may have any one of these meanings in mind, but at the very least, we know that it has the assurance of [eternal] blessing.

David Guzik goes on:

Adam Clarke wrote: These were called tesserae among the Romans, and of these there were several kinds... "Tesserae conviviales," which answered exactly to our cards of invitation, or tickets of admission to a public feast or banquet; when the person invited produced his tesserae, he was admitted... But the most remarkable of these instruments were the "Tesserae hospitales," which were given as badges of friendship and alliance, and on which some device was engraved, as a testimony that a contract of friendship had been made between the parties.

THE INNOCENTS or INNOCENT ONES

From ancient times through the Middle Ages, child mortality was high. Many in the Church of Rome and even some of the Reformation thinkers believed that the souls of these children went to a place called "Limbo," which was neither a place of punishment nor eternal heaven. It was a place of waiting for something to happen. Nobody thought this through as it was never considered then a major theological issue, like "Saved by Grace" versus "Saved by Works" or "Sola Scriptura." The Scriptures alone are revelation by God sufficient for salvation. These were the real "hot-button" issues for centuries.

So, Catholic and some Protestant denominations began the practice of infant baptism to assure the baby's parents hope for their child's permanent heavenly estate. What happens to the Innocent Ones, both born and pre-born, the moment after their physical death? Where do they go? What if their parents were not believers of the God of the Bible? What if the baby's parents had followed a different faith or no faith?

In the eyes of God, the Innocent Ones are not culpable for the sins of their parents.

Fathers shall not be put to death because of their children, nor shall children be put to death because of their fathers. Each one shall be put to death for his own sin. Deuteronomy 24:16

Years ago when extending a runway at the Damascus airport, workers uncovered a pit of burned infant bones. The bones, dated to the Canaanite peoples, were of babies from newborn up to age two. The babies were sacrificed to appease the wrath of the cast iron god, Molech, so crops would grow. These dear babies were placed immediately in the presence of God despite the horrific beliefs of their pagan parents, who were Canaanite, Aztec, Mayan, and many others.

The Apostle John is given a vision of those in heaven, and writes:

...from every tribe and language and people and nation... Revelation 5:9

Regardless of the belief system or no belief system of the parents, representatives of all these groups will be in Heaven.

The saving grace of the Gospel in the Old Testament and the later New Testament had not been communicated to "every tribe," "every language," "every people," and "every nation," in the past or present day. So how do all these tribes, languages, people, and nations get eternity with Jesus Christ in Heaven? Partly, from the Innocent Ones! All children are in the scope of God's redemption. Those lost through miscarriage or abortion are born in heaven, emotionally mature, with the spiritual intellect and capacity to have a full relationship with their Creator.

There are tribes and tongues today – the so-called "people groups" of various isolated and distinctive ethnicities, cultures, and languages – who have never heard the Gospel. Yet God's Word says representatives of those tribes and tongues will be in heaven. How is this possible? One way is through the redemption of their little ones. These will be among those who will be made "kings and priests to our God." (MacArthur on Revelation 5:10)

THE BIBLICAL WORLDVIEW

Resurrection of Believers and Innocent Ones

Again, we return to the authority and reliability of God's revealed Word.

*But now he [my baby] is dead. Why should I fast? Can I bring him back again?
I shall go to him, but he will not return to me. 2 Samuel 12:23*

King David and his wife, Bathsheba, lost their baby boy within days of his birth. "*I shall go to him, but he will not return to me.*" This is an interesting statement made by David with two schools of thought. Both views are supported by good Biblical scholarship behind them:

View #1 – *I will join him in Sheol [the grave]. He will not physically return to live here.*

View #2 – *I will see my son again in Heaven.*

Both views are technically correct. David, being a Jew, and Old Testament believer, was confident there would be a resurrection, a reunion, and everlasting life with his son and with God.

The Death of Two Sons

Let's contrast David's grieving the death of his baby boy to the later death of his adult son, Absalom. With an infant son, David ceased grieving at the point of death. But years later, when hearing of the death of an older son, he wept and agonized for an extended period.

*And the king was deeply moved and went up to the chamber over the gate and wept.
And as he went, he said, "O my son Absalom, my son, my son Absalom!
Would I had died instead of you, O Absalom, my son, my son!" 2 Samuel 18:33*

Why the opposite grief styles of David? David knew his baby was an *innocent one*, and that there will be an everlasting reunion in heaven after his own death. *Absent from the body, present with the Lord (2 Corinthians 5:8)*. No "Soul Sleep," no "Limbo," rather, an immediate presence with God.

The Bible gives us the historical account of David's son, Absalom, as a rebellious and wicked man. David mourned because he knew there will be no reunion with his adult son, an unbeliever who rejected God.

We will see this same solid understanding of the resurrection with another Old Testament believer 1,000 years prior in Job, the oldest book in the Bible.

Many people who want to know *why* they lost their loved one often turn to Job for answers. They won't find answers to that question there, but for the people who want authoritative and reliable assurance that their child is in Heaven in the presence of God, the book of Job is *exactly* where to go.

King David had access to the book of Job in scrolls, where he could read and meditate on this powerful passage in chapter 3, receiving comfort and solace *even while grieving* the impending death of his baby son. This is the peace and consolation through assurance that baby Gregory's daddy and family have today, thanks to God and baby Gregory.

Job

Job was the wealthiest and most prominent man in the East at his time. Seven sons and three daughters were born to him. His possessions included 7,000 sheep, 3,000 camels, 500 yokes of oxen, 500 female donkeys, and a large household that included servants. But this isn't what made Job God's man.

A Bible commentator notes:

Much later in the book [of Job] we will catch a glimpse of what Job actually did with his money, and with his time and energy: he rescued the needy; he cared personally for the handicapped and the dying; he brought orphans into his home; he even took the power barons of his day to court and argued the case for the underprivileged (see 29:12-17; 31:16-21). (Mason)

Job's Devastating and Sudden Losses

Now on the day when his sons and his daughters were eating and drinking wine in their oldest brother's house, a messenger came to Job and said, "The oxen were plowing and the donkeys feeding beside them, and the Sabeans attacked and took them. They also slew the servants with the edge of the sword, and I alone have escaped to tell you."

While he was still speaking, another also came and said, "The fire of God fell from heaven and burned up the sheep and the servants and consumed them, and I alone have escaped to tell you."

While he was still speaking, another also came and said, "The Chaldeans formed three bands and made a raid on the camels and took them and slew the servants with the edge of the sword, and I alone have escaped to tell you."

While he was still speaking, another also came and said, "Your sons and your daughters were eating and drinking wine in their oldest brother's house, and behold, a great wind came from across the wilderness and struck the four corners of the house, and it fell on the young people and they died, and I alone have escaped to tell you." Job 1:13-19

All in one day. Then, Job becomes afflicted by painful boils from head to toe. Medical researchers believe this condition to be "STAT₃ LOF ADHIES" (loss-of-function, autosomal dominant hyper IgE syndrome), discovered in two sisters in Seattle in 1966, and given the name "The Job Syndrome" (now partially manageable with modern medication).

When traumatic loss comes, brain physiology takes over (survival mode, fight, flight, or freeze). The brain tries to sort out, and make order of, the emotional chaos that seems nonstop. Your brain is constantly searching to find the right "file cabinet" for this "chaotic folder" that has eclipsed your life. "Order" for the brain means assigning accountability for why this went horribly wrong. Sometimes we blame "the system," sometimes others, and sometimes ourselves (more often wrongly than rightly). Often it seems easier to blame ourselves, rather than spending the rest of our lives wondering "why?" But rarely are we ever going to know why. So, it is okay to allow yourself to ponder why and not have any answer.

At the end of the book, Job never learned why all these tragedies happened, and we'll see ancient superstitions leading to misunderstandings and accusations by his three friends.

While initially demonstrating compassion, they then turn on him, making assumptions as to why these disasters have occurred. This leads Job to say, "*Miserable comforters are you all.*"

"The fire of God fell from heaven and burned up the sheep and the servants and consumed them, and I alone have escaped to tell you." Job 1:16b

The ancient mindset of superstition was that if tragedy struck, you had committed some offense to incur the wrath of God or the gods. Accordingly, the surviving servant assumed Job sinned and was being punished by his God.

We see this mindset 2,000 years later in the New Testament Gospel of John, chapter 9:1–3, when Jesus and his disciples passed by a man born blind. "*Rabbi [Teacher], who sinned, this man or his parents that he was born blind?*"

Jesus debunks this fatalistic worldview while teaching his disciples: "*It was not that this man sinned, or his parents....*"

Another commentator notes:

It was widely held that suffering, and especially such a disaster as blindness, was due to sin. The general principle was laid down by Rabbi Ammi: 'There is no death without sin, and there is no suffering without iniquity.' (Morris)

In Jesus' day, this was the ancient worldview perpetuated by the Jewish Rabbis, who also mishandled the Exodus 20:5b passage to teach that God pronounced a curse on the next 3-4 generations of children for the sins of their fathers (leaders of their families and leaders of Israel).

"...visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children to the third and fourth generations of those who hate Me," Exodus 20:5b

We see today in the ACE (Adverse Childhood Experiences) Study¹, where many children raised under poor parenting conditions (alcoholism, drug abuse, physical and psychological abuse) and did not receive sufficient nurturing or protective attachment that should have begun at birth, do not simply "recover" from their exposure to such conditions as they grow. Childhood traumas that continue unattended by love, or professional or spiritual support, lead to suffering that transitions to behavioral and emotional dysfunctions through adolescence and adulthood. This tragedy is sometimes compounded by a misdiagnosis of Bi-Polar Disorder, ADHD (Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder), or a long list of other disorders. Being primarily or secondarily traumatized as a family member of a traumatized individual can take *generations* to unravel and heal. This is not a punishment from God. This is an undeserved consequence of living with pain from unaddressed traumas. Wise parenting can mitigate much of the resultant behavior, but the mature adult survivor will still seek opportunities to do further work when the time comes.

'The fathers have eaten sour grapes, and the children's teeth are set on edge.' Ezekiel 18:2b

*The proverb was a protest, a complaint. The idea was the present generation was being unjustly punished for what their **fathers** did. One would think that if **the fathers have eaten sour grapes**, then the fathers would have the sour taste in their teeth. According to the proverb, the fathers didn't have the sour taste and the children did. (Guzik)*

The children are paying the price for the lifestyle of the fathers (or parents). The “teeth set on edge” can go on for generations. The generation in which we live, and you know how bad it is, will not be turned around soon. But it can be healed.

The son shall not suffer for the iniquity of the father, nor the father suffer for the iniquity of the son. The righteousness of the righteous shall be upon himself, and the wickedness of the wicked shall be upon himself. Ezekiel 18:20

Job’s Traumatic Responses – Chapter 3

In verses 1–5, Job curses the day he was born. David Guzik writes:

Here, in fine Hebrew poetic style, Job cursed the day of his birth. Yet if that were not enough, he goes even further back and curses the night of his conception. Job’s complaint is that it would be better if he were never born than to endure his present catastrophe of affliction.

Described further in the chapter is God’s everlasting estate for each child, whether death occurred in the womb and the child is born in heaven, or after the baby’s physical birth. They’re in the presence of God.

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 lain down and been quiet; I would have slept; then I would have been at rest, with kings and counselors of the earth who rebuilt ruins for themselves, or with princes who had gold, who filled their houses with silver.

*Or 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. Job 3:11–19*

In this passage, Job describes heaven for the stillborn child.

He compares his life of misery, sorrow, and oppression with that of the stillborn child and concludes the stillborn child is better off. Such a little one is free from all strife, all torment, all pain and suffering, and all bondage. (MacArthur)

*Even after my skin is destroyed, Yet from my flesh I shall see God; Whom I myself shall behold,
And whom my eyes will see and not another. My heart faints within me! Job 19:26–27*

Job believed in a resurrection in which he would be in the presence of God. Job concluded he would have been better off being stillborn and in the immediate presence of his Creator and experiencing everlasting rest from all pain and suffering.

We saw earlier the heart of Job and his compassion for others. But Job also stood with the sound theology revealed by God, and unwavering faith in the revealed Word of God, when experiencing the best of times and the worst of times. This is the subject of the world's oldest writing about a relationship between a man and the one true God.

Who is the Greatest? (Matthew 18:1–5; Mark 9:33–37; Luke 9:46–48)

Truly, I say to you, unless you turn and become like children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven. Matthew 18:3

This was a *revolutionary* statement by Jesus. Why? Every time Jesus uses the word “Truly” or the phrase “Truly, truly,” he’s telling the listeners “This is new information to you.” You must be childlike to become a believer. It was a time when children were considered property rather than individuals. They were considered weak, and dependent. This is what Jesus is looking for; the characteristics of a child.

Children are not threatening; we aren't afraid of meeting a five-year-old in a dark alley. When we have a tough, intimidating presence, we aren't like Jesus. Children are not good at deceiving; they are pretty miserable failures at fooling their parents. When we are good at hiding ourselves and deceiving others, we aren't like Jesus. (Carson)

Jesus wants us to approach him with a childlike wonder that gets lost in adulthood. In the New Testament, the Apostle Paul uses the Greek word *mystérion*, or *mystery*. *Mystérion* can mean that the more you eagerly learn about something, like a teaching of Jesus, the more awestruck you become. You can never comprehend it on earth, but you are always seeking to know more. This is a childlike wonder.

Your child is held up as the ideal of wonder and humility, without concern for social status. The innocent ones are among the greatest!

ASSURANCE

I hope these Biblical truths provide you with a new understanding of your child's presence with God and provide solace; not removing the pain, but allowing the pain to change shape. A parent's grief (their love connection with their child) will never go away completely, and they wouldn't want it to. I often enjoy reading how people celebrate and memorialize the life of their child, and how the pain and suffering from losing their child has transformed them.

Many things they said worked for them included talking with a trusted listener and others who have lost a child, journaling, writing on a blog, a butterfly release memorial service, memorial art, individualized wind chimes, planting a tree, and many other rituals that worked for them.

¹ For more on childhood trauma, please visit the website on the MEDIA tab and view the TED Talk [HOW CHILDHOOD TRAUMA AFFECTS HEALTH ACROSS A LIFETIME](#) by Dr. Nadine Burke-Harris. See also under RESOURCES the article [DIAGNOSIS: I'M NOT BROKEN: The Pathologizing of Grief and Trauma](#) in the Discussing Treatment Alternatives section.