



Studies in the Life of David

Text

Second Samuel 12:16-23

Topic

After his child dies David worships the Lord knowing that he will join him one day

Title

“Sudden Infant Salvation Syndrome”

or

“Taken Baby Syndrome”

Introduction

Miscarriage... Ectopic pregnancy... Stillbirth... Neonatal death... Sudden infant death syndrome... Fatal childhood diseases and accidents.

Every one of us has been impacted emotionally by one or more of these.

Without ignoring, and hopefully while being sensitive to, the emotional aspects of the death of a child, I want to talk about the spiritual implications. Namely, I want to answer definitively and, of course, biblically, the question everyone has when a child dies, the question I've been asked many times over the years: “Is my baby in Heaven?”

King David's experiences with the premature death of his child will be our background.

I'll organize my thoughts around two points: #1 While There Is Life You Appeal To God Knowing He Is Gracious, and #2 When There Is Death You Reveal God By Showing He Is Great.

#1 While There Is Life You Appeal To God
Knowing He Is Gracious
(v16-19)

David's adultery with Bathsheba, and his subsequent cover-up that included ordering her husband's murder and marrying her, had just been exposed by Nathan the prophet. As he left David, Nathan declared,

2 Samuel 12:14 However, because by this deed you have given great occasion to the enemies of the Lord to blaspheme, the child also who is born to you shall surely die."

How do we deal with the fact that the Bible attributes the sickness and death directly to the Lord? Isn't that a little harsh?

It's just like us to shift the blame. I'm not saying that there isn't an interesting and important theological discussion to be had, but the real focus ought to be on the fact that our sin often brings consequences upon an innocent party. It was David who had brought this upon his son.

Behind all of our questions and complaints about human suffering is the fact that Adam and Eve brought sin into the world in their disobedience in the Garden of Eden. From the moment they sinned, God has been working to redeem what they forfeited. He has a masterful plan that involved God becoming man in the person of Jesus Christ in order to take our place by dying on the cross. All those who trust in Jesus as their Savior from sin are redeemed. They are saved. But the world itself still waits for the final redemption and, thus, sin still exists and brings with it many terrible consequences.

The consequences of David's sin began to play out.

2 Samuel 12:15 Then Nathan departed to his house. And the Lord struck the child that Uriah's wife bore to David, and it became ill.

2 Samuel 12:16 David therefore pleaded with God for the child, and David fasted and went in and lay all night on the ground.

It's probably best to jump ahead and read David's own explanation for his actions. It's in verse twenty-two.

2 Samuel 12:22 And he said, "While the child was alive, I fasted and wept; for I said, 'Who can tell whether the Lord will be gracious to me, that the child may live?'

But I thought God said He was going to kill the child? He did, but David appealed to God's gracious nature to show him mercy instead.

God sometimes seems to change His mind. For example: A little later in the history of Israel King Hezekiah will fall ill. The prophet Isaiah tells him to put his affairs in order because he is going to die. The king will seek the Lord and we read, "And the word of the LORD came to Isaiah, saying, "Go and tell Hezekiah, 'Thus says the LORD, the God of David your father: "I have heard your prayer, I have seen your tears; surely I will add to your days fifteen years.'""

On another occasion God will send a reluctant Jonah to the Assyrian capital to tell the residents of Nineveh that their destruction was imminent. They repent and God relents.

God doesn't so much change His mind as He acts in ways that are consistent with His nature. Since He is gracious, merciful, and forgiving, we can always appeal to Him to consider alternative actions that are consistent with His nature. Prayer can indeed influence God.

2 Samuel 12:17 So the elders of his house arose and went to him, to raise him up from the ground. But he would not, nor did he eat food with them.

2 Samuel 12:18 Then on the seventh day it came to pass that the child died. And the servants of David were afraid to tell him that the child was dead. For they said, "Indeed, while the child was alive, we spoke to him, and he would not heed our voice. How can we tell him that the child is dead? He may do some harm!"

Sometimes God does not alter the course. Extraordinary prayer and fasting are not magical techniques by which we get God to do what we

want. If you've sought the Lord for something, like someone's life, and death was the result, it isn't because you were insincere or failed to understand some 'deeper' spiritual method. It was the will of God. We would go so far as to say that God's choice in the matter was the one He deemed to bring the most glory to Himself - even though often we do not see it that way at the time.

Then was all your praying and fasting for nought? No, it prepares your heart for God's outcome. It aligns you with God's will.

The child died "on the seventh day." Was this seven days after the announcement? Or the seventh day of the child's life? Many commentators take it to mean the seventh day of his life. If so, there is an interesting point to be made. On the eighth day a male Hebrew infant was circumcised as the sign of God's covenant with His people. David's child falling one day short of circumcision would be a reminder to the king that within God's unconditional covenant promises to Israel were many that were conditioned upon obedience. The enjoyment of God's covenants with Israel depended upon obedience. Disobedience brought discipline.

The child died and David's servants did not know how to approach him with the news. Let's cut them some slack. It's never easy to deliver news like that. Reactions can run the gamut. And David hadn't exactly been himself lately, what with ordering the murder of Uriah and all!

2 Samuel 12:19 When David saw that his servants were whispering, David perceived that the child was dead. Therefore David said to his servants, "Is the child dead?" And they said, "He is dead."

David could tell something had happened. Note the clear, direct language used by both David and his servants. They used the word "dead." They didn't try to soften the blow with a euphemism for death.

I remember one time a doctor telling a woman that her husband, who had been brought to the ER by ambulance, had died. He told her, "Your husband is in a better place." She asked him, "Where?", because she took

his words to mean that he had been transferred to a different hospital with better equipment.

Pray and fast and weep. “Who can tell whether the Lord will be gracious to me, that the child may live?”

In the case of David, Bathsheba and their son, God decided His glory would be more on display through the infant’s death.

#2 When There Is Death You Reveal God
By Showing He Is Great
(v20-23)

David’s servants misunderstood his zeal in seeking the Lord. They thought he’d be crushed by God’s saying, “No,” to his request, that he might even do some harm to himself or others.

Again I want to say that reactions to this kind of tragedy run the gamut. Everyone has their own way of putting things into spiritual perspective. We shouldn’t try to force someone into our own ideas of how they ought to react. We shouldn’t think they are not sorrowful enough, or not spiritual enough. It’s often best to have what is called a ‘ministry of presence.’ Just be there for them.

2 Samuel 12:20 So David arose from the ground, washed and anointed himself, and changed his clothes; and he went into the house of the Lord and worshiped. Then he went to his own house; and when he requested, they set food before him, and he ate.

David had spiritual clarity. He had been restored and was ready to serve the Lord. He served Him first by prayer and fasting for his son, another little lamb God had entrusted him with. Now David would turn his attention to shepherding God’s flock, the nation of Israel.

2 Samuel 12:21 Then his servants said to him, "What is this 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."

2 Samuel 12:22 And he said, "While the child was alive, I fasted and wept; for I said, 'Who can tell whether the Lord will be gracious to me, that the child may live?'

2 Samuel 12:23 But now he is dead; why should I fast? Can I bring him back again? I shall go to him, but he shall not return to me."

The servants were perplexed. They did not understand David's reasoning. He seemed joyful now that the child was dead.

He was joyful! Or, at least, worshipful. He knew something about his child, something wonderful. **He knew he would see him again!**

I mentioned earlier that God does what brings Him the greatest glory. The death of this child, David's son, tragic as it was, has been a comfort to countless millions who have themselves lost children. With hindsight we can confidently say that his death has been powerfully used by God.

David said, "I shall go to him, but he shall not return to me." We're saying it is a declaration that the child was immediately with the Lord at death. There are some who argue that David's words simply meant that one day he, too, would join his child in death. They take his statement to mean *only* that death is universal. They see no hope of Heaven in his statement.

That makes no **biblical** sense.

1. First, the clear context of his statement indicates he expected to be reunited with his child. His joyful actions, too, indicate he expected to be reunited one day, not just in death but in eternal life.
2. Second, if you require further proof David was joyful about a future heavenly reunion, we can discuss David's reaction to the death of another of his sons, Absalom. Absalom, as a full-grown man, rebelled against David and sinned terribly. When he was killed David was grief-stricken. He wept bitterly, even wishing he could have died instead of his son. David had a very different, a very severe, reaction to the death of Absalom. Why? **Because David was not at all sure of Absalom's relationship with God!**

The contrast in David's reactions to the deaths of these two boys communicates that he absolutely believed he would be reunited with his

infant son. Verse twenty-three *must* be understood as a declaration that David's son preceded him to Heaven. (Technically, to the place Jesus would call 'Abraham's bosom,' where the spirits of the Old Testament saints went to be comforted as they awaited the coming of the promised Savior).

Although this passage by itself speaks volumes, it's not the only reason we can confidently declare that children who die go to Heaven. Let me survey some other things that point us in the same direction.

Jesus gave an extra measure of attention to children while He was on the earth. He claimed they had a place in His kingdom and even used them to illustrate the character of a person who would enter the kingdom. He often took little children in His arms and blessed them.

Mark 10:13 Then they brought little children to Him, that He might touch them; but the disciples rebuked those who brought them.

Mark 10:14 But when Jesus saw it, He was greatly displeased and said to them, "Let the little children come to Me, and do not forbid them; for of such is the kingdom of God.

Mark 10:15 Assuredly, I say to you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God as a little child will by no means enter it."

Mark 10:16 And He took them up in His arms, laid His hands on them, and blessed them.

Here's another thing to consider. **There is at least one example in the Bible of an unborn child who was saved!**

In the case of John the Baptist we read of his actual possession of salvation in his mother's womb before he was born. In Luke 1:15 the angel Gabriel predicts that John would "be filled with the Holy Spirit while yet in his mother's womb" (v41 & 44). Theologian Wayne Grudem comments, "We might say that John the Baptist was 'born again' *before he was born!*"

In the case of John the Baptist we see that a child in the womb, though human and the inheritor of a sin nature, was definitely saved. In the case of David's seven-day old son we see that, though human and the inheritor of a sin nature, he immediately went to be with the Lord. It's enough biblically to conclude that children who die are saved.

But **how** can they be saved? On what basis, since we are all inheritors of sin?

Salvation is made possible by Jesus dying on the Cross and rising from the dead. Commenting upon the salvation God has provided, the apostle Paul said in First Timothy 4:10,

1 Timothy 4:10 For to this end we both labor and suffer reproach, because we trust in the living God, **who is the Savior of all men, especially of those who believe.**

It's an important statement because it establishes that the Cross of Jesus Christ is sufficient to save the entire human race. Those who exercise faith and "believe" are actually saved. Those who do not exercise faith remain dead in their trespasses and sins.

The question we are asking is, "What about all those, like infants and children, who **cannot** believe, who **cannot** exercise faith?"

Those who cannot believe are never called upon in the Bible to believe! Only adults capable of making a decision are called upon to believe. Infants and young children, *and we would add anyone who is mentally incapable of making a decision*, **are never called upon to believe in order to be saved.**

Faith has no merit of its own. It adds nothing to the salvation provided by Jesus Christ. It's absence in those who cannot believe does not exclude them from being saved.

Is this universalism? Am I saying that *everyone* is saved? **Of course not!** I'm saying that in the case of all who cannot believe God is able to apply the finished work of Jesus Christ on the Cross without the need for them to exercise faith.

God Himself often distinguishes between the decision-making capacity of adults and children. We find one important example in the Old Testament book of Deuteronomy. God was explaining to the Israelites that because of

their prior decision to disobey God they would never enter the Promised Land. God, however, would not hold their children accountable for that decision.

Deuteronomy 1:39 'Moreover your little ones and your children, who you say will be victims, who today have no knowledge of good and evil, they shall go in there; to them I will give it, and they shall possess it.

There are other passages we could cite that speak of children as having no “knowledge” of good and evil and, so, not held accountable (Jonah 4:11 & Romans 9:11). They are still sinners, inheritors of a sin nature. But when they die God can save them by His grace based on the shed blood of Jesus *without faith that they cannot possibly exercise.*

Some would argue that the Bible never states a particular ‘age of accountability.’ That’s true, there is no one age at which accountability kicks-in. But it is clear from the passage in Deuteronomy that God Himself distinguishes between adults who can be held accountable for their decisions and children who cannot.

Am I going out on a theological limb? If so, **I’ve got company!**

James Strong, theologian and famous for the *Strong’s Concordance*, writes,

The condition of salvation for adults is personal faith. Infants are incapable of fulfilling this condition. **Since Christ has died for all, we have reason to believe that provision is made for their reception of Christ in some other way.**

Another theologian, Dr. Robert Lightner, writes,

Faith has no merit of its own. It adds nothing to the complete salvation provided by Christ... Since faith contributes nothing, its absence in those who cannot exercise it does not hinder the sovereign God from accomplishing in them all that He does in those who can and do believe. All who can believe **must** do so to receive eternal life. All who cannot believe receive the same eternal life provided by Christ for them at the time of death because they are able to neither receive nor to reject it.

Regarding the place of personal faith in salvation, even the Reformer, John Calvin, insisted that while Romans 10:17 (“so then faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God”) makes hearing the beginning of faith, Paul was only describing the usual method which the Lord uses in calling people to Himself. Calvin said, “[Paul is] “not laying down an invariable rule, for which no other method can be substituted” (*Institutes of the Christian Religion*, book IV, 542).

In other words, God **can** save apart from a person exercising personal faith, and He does in fact save in the case of those who cannot exercise faith, e.g., infants and children and the mentally disabled.

It’s a whole other subject but let me very briefly address the question of salvation for those who’ve never heard the Gospel. Evangelicals like ourselves believe that God has given everyone a witness of Himself in both their *conscience* and in *creation*. These are insufficient in and of themselves to save a person, but if a person responds to the witness God has given them *within* and *without*, God will see to it that those who are seeking Him will receive a greater witness so that they can either reject His offer of salvation or receive it through faith. (See Acts 17:24-28).

Salvation is in Christ alone, in His shed blood as the Sacrifice and Substitute for every member of the human race. Those who can discern between good and evil, who are capable of choosing, are held accountable and must exercise faith to receive God’s free gift of salvation.

God, however, distinguishes between adults and children. He does **not** hold children accountable who cannot discern between good and evil. He does **not** condemn them to Hell for a decision they cannot make.

Instead we see that Jesus called children to Himself and spoke of them as illustrations of those who would inherit the kingdom. We also know that at least one unborn child was definitely saved from his mother’s womb, and another child, a seven-day old infant not yet even circumcised, was declared to be with the Lord at the time of his death.

It is therefore more than mere wishful thinking to absolutely declare, from the Bible, that children who die prematurely are in Heaven. We **will** be reunited with them one day.

God is great! “Therefore comfort one another with these words.”

