

INTRODUCTION

The infant mortality rate (IMR)¹ in the United States has been increasing, and is higher than the rate in many developed countries. Due to the tremendous improvements in nutrition, sanitation, hygiene, medicine, and living standards in the twentieth century, the global average IMR is now around 4 percent. But throughout most of human history, infant and child mortality rates were extremely high. It has been estimated that half of all children born in history died before reaching the age of fifteen. And this does not include abortions, miscarriages, and stillbirths. Whatever the exact infant mortality rates are now and have been throughout history, that is millions and millions of dead infants.

The question, then, for Christians who believe that man is sinful and depraved, that man is under the condemnation of God, that there is a judgment, that there is a literal heaven and a literal hell, and that salvation is only by faith in Jesus Christ, is a natural one: What happens to infants who die? And then there is the related question: What happens to fetuses, embryos, young children, imbeciles, and idiots who die?²

Are they saved? Are they lost? Are they neither saved nor lost but somewhere in between? Are they innocent? Are they guilty? Are they neither guilty nor innocent but somewhere in between? Are they holy? Are they safe? Do they have to be saved? Do they have to be regenerated to be saved? Do they have to be baptized to be saved? Do they have to be elected to be saved? Do they have to have faith to be saved? Does the faith of their parents have anything to do with it? Do they remain in an infantile state in limbo? Do they just cease to exist?

The author is a Bible-believing Baptist who rejects Pelagianism, Augustinianism, Romanism, Calvinism, Arminianism, Lutheranism, Wesleyanism, Universalism, Inclusivism, and Reformed Theology.

¹ IMR: the number of deaths per 1,000 live births of children under one year of age.

² All references to infant salvation in this book include fetuses, embryos, abortions, miscarriages, stillbirths, babies, toddlers, young children, imbeciles, and idiots.

This does not necessarily mean that everything said by members of these groups regarding infant salvation is wrong, only that I am not beholden to any confession of faith, system of theology, school of interpretation, or faith tradition, including Baptist.

So, why this study on such an unpleasant subject? In the words of the nineteenth-century Scottish clergyman and prolific author John Cumming (1807–1881), who himself wrote on this subject: “The author wrote this little work originally for himself. Its thoughts interested and instructed his own mind, and he indulged the hope they would not fail to interest the minds of others also.”³ After reading everything I know of that has been written specifically on the topic of infant salvation, my thoughts parallel those of Lutheran minister M. J. Firey (1840–1908) in 1902:

The writer, after having carefully studied the history of the doctrines pertaining to this subject, modestly ventures to assert that no one of the theories evolved meets in all respects the Scriptural requirements in the case; the speculative character of them all and the lack of certainty betrayed by the advocates of each confirm this belief. In view of these facts, and, as he hopes, in the interest of sound doctrine and true piety as well, he ventures to present his own views upon this subject. To his own mind they seem Scriptural, and therefore safe and sound. Whether he is correct or not remains to be seen.⁴

It is to Scripture alone, then, that we must turn. As John MacArthur (1939–2025) has more recently said: “When we look into the grave of a little one, we must not place our hope or trust in a false promise, in an unbiblical theology, or in the instability of sentimentalism, or in the cold analysis of human logic. Rather, we must look to what God’s word has to say on the matter.”⁵ It is my contention that most of the passages of Scripture used to prove the salvation of all who die in infancy do not prove any such thing and that many of them are not even related to the subject at hand. I also maintain that the doctrine of infant salvation has been tainted by erroneous notions of infant baptism, covenant theology, original sin, and unconditional election.

³ John Cumming, *Infant Salvation; or, All Saved that Die in Infancy* (Philadelphia: Lindsay and Blakiston, 1855), xi.

⁴ M. J. Firey, *Infant Salvation: The Passivity of Infants the Key to This Perplexing Subject* (New York and London: Funk & Wagnalls Co., 1902), 215.

⁵ John MacArthur, *Safe in the Arms of God: Truth from Heaven about the Death of a Child* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 2003), 13.

My approach is a scriptural one, and not a speculative one. I aim to not go beyond what the Bible says. As I said, I make no attempt at conformity with any confession of faith, system of theology, school of interpretation, or faith tradition, including Baptist. My approach is a scriptural one, and not an emotional one. I have never lost a child or grandchild, and have never been acquainted with anyone at the time that they lost a child. I am not writing to confirm something that I want to be true. My approach is a scriptural one, and not a historical one. Although I have intensely studied and am very familiar with what has been written on the topic of infant salvation throughout history, this book does not include a detailed summary of who said what and why what they said is right or wrong. Much of that work has been done, and would unnecessarily double the size of the book.

There are a number of things that this book is not and does not touch on. This book is not a treatise on anthropology, hamartiology, or soteriology. This book does not touch on why God allows miscarriages, stillbirths, and abortions to take place. This book does not touch on why God allows millions upon millions of souls to enter into the world only to inhabit infant bodies for a few days, weeks, or months. This book does not touch on why God allows infants and children around the world to die of neglect, starvation, accident, disease, violence, or abuse. This book does not touch on why God allows infants to die because of the sins of their parents (Gen. 6:7; Jos. 6:21; 1 Sam. 15:3). This book does not touch on why God allows infants to be murdered (Exo. 1:16; Mat. 2:16). This book does not touch on why God allows promiscuous unmarried girls to get pregnant but won't give Christian married couples a child. This is not a book about how to cope with the loss of a child. It is not a book about how to respond to grieving parents who have lost a child. It is not a book about how to use the death of a child for the glory of God. It is not a book about how a preacher is to minister to those who have lost a child. It is not a book about child evangelism. This book does not touch on the glories of heaven, whether parents will know their dead children in heaven, what age children will be in heaven, or the nature of glorified bodies in heaven. Many of these things are no doubt important, some would be interesting to know, and others there is no firm answer to, but all are beyond the scope of this book.

The author possesses originals or copies of everything listed in the bibliography. No stone has been left unturned.