
STILLBORN CHILDREN

Medically, a stillborn child is a dead fetus developed to a point at which it normally would have been viable. Religiously, one major question is whether a stillborn child ever was “a living soul” (Moses 3:7) that can be resurrected and be part of its parents’ eternal family. Because “there is no information given by revelation” (DS 2:280), the Church has made no official statement on the matter. President Brigham YOUNG once stated as his opinion that “when the mother feels life come to her infant it is the spirit entering the body” (JD 17:143). Others have speculated that the spirit might not enter the fetus until just before birth, and still others have suggested that three elements constitute a living soul—body, SPIRIT, and “breath of life” (Moses 3:7).

Because Church policy permits temple sealings to be performed for children who die after birth, but not for those who die before birth, some have concluded that stillborn children will not be resurrected. However, the current *General Handbook of Instructions* (1989) states that the policy of not sealing stillborn children to their parents implies “no loss of eternal blessings or family unity” (6-8). Latter-day Saints trust God’s loving kindness to accord to each of his spirit children the eternal state which is proper, through judgment which is both just and merciful.

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STRAIT AND NARROW

Latter-day Saints speak of following the “strait and narrow” path to ETERNAL LIFE. These words are found in both ancient and modern scripture. For them as for other Christians, probably the best-known passage in which these words are conjoined is Matthew 7:13–14: “Enter ye in at the strait gate: . . . because strait is the gate, and narrow is the way, which leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it.”

“Strait” and “narrow” mean approximately the same: constricted, tight. The juxtaposition of synonyms is a typical Hebrew literary parallelism. The

terms thus translated reveal diverse nuances, enhancing the implications of the metaphors. The Greek word *stene(s)*, translated “strait” in the King James Bible, is defined as “narrow.” The word for “narrow” is the perfect passive participle of *thlibo*, meaning “pressed together, made narrow, oppressed.” Several Hebrew words exhibit similar meanings. Jesus Christ and a number of prophets utilized such terms in constructing an image with diverse applications, but with the ultimate end of portraying the strict path to God’s presence.

In the Book of Mormon, LEHI uses especially vivid imagery in recounting his vision of the TREE OF LIFE: “And I beheld a rod of iron, and it extended along the bank of the river. . . . And I also beheld a strait and narrow path, which came along by the rod of iron” (1 Ne. 8:19–20). Near the end of his record, NEPHI₁, son of Lehi, offers the clearest explanation of the images in this vision, pointing out that the gate to the strait and narrow path consists of repentance, baptism, and remission of sins. The gospel, then, is the good news that there exists such a path, which men and women can follow to eternal life by “press[ing] forward, feasting upon the word of Christ, and endur[ing] to the end” (2 Ne. 31:17–20). This emphasis on Christ is in harmony with the observation that the strait and narrow path is the “way.” One may compare Jesus’ response to Thomas in John 14:6: “I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me.”

The connotations of the Hebrew and Greek words for “strait” and “narrow” suggest that the path is not easy. One’s journey on the path is to be a challenge, but not so strenuous a one that it is hopeless. Jesus affirmed, “My yoke is easy, and my burden is light” (Matt. 11:30). A related concept is found in a homophone of “strait,” with different etymological roots. It is expressed in a poignant psalm wherein Nephi prayed to the Lord, “Wilt thou make my path straight before me! Wilt thou not place a stumbling block in my way—but that thou wouldst clear my way before me, and hedge not up my way” (2 Ne. 4:33).

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