

Article: DA365

## EXODUS AND ABORTION

This article first appeared in the Viewpoint column of the *Christian Research Journal*, volume 27, number 1 (2004). For further information or to subscribe to the *Christian Research Journal* go to: <http://www.equip.org>

Scott Klusendorf has presented several excellent pro-life arguments in his feature article in this issue of the JOURNAL based upon the hypothetical “given” that Scripture is silent on the issue of abortion. Many scholars, however, believe Scripture does, in fact, address the issue, even if not explicitly. Scripture provides us with principles that, through the exercise of godly wisdom, can be applied to the wide variety of situations we encounter in modern culture. In the realm of human behavior, there is “nothing new under the sun,” and the Bible, written by One who knows the human heart intimately, does indeed speak to every aspect of human life, including our thoughts, our actions, and our beliefs.

The value of human life as something special, a gift from God, is found throughout Scripture. The commandment not to murder carries with it the corollary responsibility to save and honor life. Many today dismiss the influence of God’s moral law on the nations of the West. The laws of most of those nations, nevertheless, are steeped in the recognition of such things as “inalienable rights” — inalienable because they are derived from our Creator. One such inalienable right is life.

The story of how Western civilizations have departed from a high view of human life to the current view that justifies infanticide is sad and complex; indeed, modern Western culture has sanctified a form of infanticide. Abortion is internal infanticide: the murder of a child at the most vulnerable time of life — those precious months when the child develops and grows while sheltered in the womb. There is no medical, philosophical, theological, or rational difference between the violent murder of an infant who has lived long enough to travel down the birth canal and the same infant separated by a small period of time or a space measurable in inches. Undeniable facts, knowable to anyone who inquires into the subject, establish the humanity and personhood of the infant in the womb. Modern society, however, preferring sexual license to truth and morality, has sanctioned infanticide under the more palatable term “abortion” and the even more wishful phrase “termination of pregnancy.” So committed are the proponents of intrauterine infanticide that the procedure known as “partial-birth abortion,” an act comparable to the mass murders the Nazis committed at Auschwitz and Dachau, is unashamedly protected and defended at all political and moral cost by many of the highest leaders in government.

The passage of time has only added to the guilt of destroying our young. Our advancing technology now allows us to peer directly into the womb and observe the wonder of the developing child. We now know, beyond question, that the preborn child is an individual human being who possesses a unique genetic code. Anyone who uses terms like “mass of tissue” to describe the preborn child is engaging in sophistry, for the facts demonstrate beyond all doubt his or her humanity and individuality. These facts are so compelling on any logical, scientific, or forensic level that the proponents of abortion, in general, seek to avoid, at all costs, direct and fair debate with those who oppose abortion and who are well prepared to make their case.

The immorality of abortion is also easily discerned by a review of the biblical facts, and Klusendorf has laid out the case along a number of lines. Scripture is the firmest foundation upon which to condemn this heinous act. The Bible provides no basis on which anyone can possibly build a case for the murder of unborn children, and the few attempts that have been made to do so are so easily refuted that it is easy to understand why their originators hide from serious interaction with biblical scholars and apologists. The biblical case against the taking of life is, in fact, full and robust, even though the specific action of abortion

(since it utilizes modern technological procedures) is not explicitly addressed. Human technology progresses; yet humans remain unchanged. The principles of Scripture, therefore, remain applicable today.

God differentiates Himself from all false gods primarily by claiming to be the Creator of all things. His greatest creation is humankind, which is created in His image (Gen. 1:27). Humans are the special workmanship of God, different from all the rest of His creation. Listen to these words of the psalmist:

For You formed my inward parts;  
You wove me in my mother's womb.  
I will give thanks to You, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made;  
Wonderful are Your works,  
And my soul knows it very well.  
My frame was not hidden from You,  
When I was made in secret,  
And skillfully wrought in the depths of the earth;  
Your eyes have seen my unformed substance;  
And in Your book were all written  
The days that were ordained for me,  
When as yet there was not one of them.(Ps. 139:13–16 NASB 1995 ed.)

The Bible knows nothing of humanity as a random-chance result of natural processes. Humanity is the specific creation of God, and clearly the existence of a *person* can be traced from the very first stages of development *prior to birth*. John the Baptist, for example, experienced the ministry of the Holy Spirit *while yet unborn*, for when Mary greeted John's mother, Elizabeth, the child leaped in the womb at the sound of Mary's voice (Luke 1:41). Inanimate objects and "masses of tissue" do not respond to the ministry of the Spirit, nor do they leap at the sound of the voice of the Lord's mother. How can the personhood of the preborn child be denied in such a situation as this? Are we seriously to make John an *exception*? If so, on what basis?

One of the most important passages on this topic is found in Exodus 21:22–25. The passage reads:

And if men fight and hit a pregnant woman and her child is born prematurely [ESV: "her children come out"], but there is no serious injury, he will surely be punished in accordance with what the woman's husband will put on him, and he will pay what the court decides. But if there is serious injury, then you will give a life for a life, eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot, burn for burn, wound for wound, bruise for bruise. (NET)

Many attempts have been made to confuse this passage and strip it of its clarity. Some ancient translators inserted their own interpretation into the passage, and many have followed their understanding over the years. One could claim that a "majority" of commentators have taken the passage to refer only to a miscarriage; yet, the text is far less obscure than many would have us believe. Consider the following: the term *yeled* in the original text is translated "child" with reference to a living human being the vast majority of the times it is used in the Old Testament. This is joined with the verb *yasa*, "to come out," which is never used in the Bible to refer to a miscarriage. Only once in all the uses of this verb regarding birth is it found in a passage that speaks of something other than a live birth, that being an obvious case of stillbirth (Num. 12:12). There is no reason, however, to think that anything other than the live birth of a human being is in view in Exodus 21:22 — a live birth that is brought on prematurely by men striking a pregnant woman while fighting with each other. In more than 1,075 uses of this word in the Hebrew Bible, it is never translated "miscarriage." This is clearly a live, but premature, birth.<sup>1</sup>

The man who strikes the woman is to be punished for bringing on the premature birth. The phrase "if there is no serious injury" refers to both the mother and the child born of her; to say otherwise is to ignore the normative use of *yeled* and *yasa*. The phrase "if there is serious injury," therefore, would likewise refer to both the mother and the child. What follows, then, is the *lex talionis*, which indicates that the punishment in the case of more serious injury should be "life for life," literally "soul for soul." This text identifies the *yeled*, the child born prematurely, as a *nephesh*, a soul, a living human being. It then applies the death penalty in the case of the death of either the mother *or* the child.

The testimony of Scripture is compelling: Life is a sacred gift, and we are to protect and honor it. Taking the life of a child in the womb differs not at all from taking the life of the mother, or anyone else. All the platitudes and politically correct phrases will not change the verdict of God: Abortion is infanticide, and it is an abomination in His eyes.

— *James R. White*

## NOTES

1. I am aware of the counterarguments presented in such articles as Joe M. Sprinkle's "The Interpretation of Exodus 21:22–25 (*Lex Talionis*) and Abortion" (*Westminster Theological Journal* 55,2 [Fall 1993]: 233–53) and in particular the insistence that the plural form of *yeled* is to be taken as a "plural of abstraction." It is argued that the most premature births would have resulted in miscarriages in that historical context. That is true; however, I believe the phrase "yet there is no injury" is left hanging unless the child is included. The LXX (Septuagint), moreover, translates the term *yeled* as a singular.