

## ABORTION: WHAT SAY THE SCRIPTURES?

Few subjects are as emotionally charged as that of abortion. Society has become polarized. “Right to Life” groups and “Pro Choice” advocates are militantly lined up in opposition to each other.

Much of the debate circles angrily around peripheral issues: unwanted pregnancies bringing unwanted and poorly treated children into an over-populated world; the pain of knowingly giving birth to a child with a diagnosed birth defect; abortion in the situation where only the life of mother or child can be saved; cases of rape, incest, and many others.

One point both sides can agree on is that a key question to be resolved is: When does life begin? Arguing for the beginning of life at conception, the anti-abortion forces freely characterize abortion as “murder.” On the other hand, the opposing view holds that an abortion is merely the removal of lifeless tissue.

As Christians, we must look for the answer to this question, as to all questions, in the Bible—the Word of God. But, can a book so old relate to such a modern inquiry? Abortion was practiced in Bible times. It is expressly forbidden in the Hippocratic Oath of the medical profession, a document dating to about 380 B.C. However, it is never expressly addressed in the pages of Holy Writ, and the Bible’s answer must be deduced from other broad principles expressed in the Scriptures.

While the Bible does not discuss abortion specifically, it does deal extensively with the question of when, in the begettal-birth process, human life begins. Since this is an issue which both sides of the abortion debate concur is central to the discussion, we want to examine the Scriptural testimony on this subject.

### **GOD’S “BOOK”**

*PSALM 139:14-16—“I will praise Thee; for I am fearfully and wonderfully made: marvelous are Thy works; and that my soul knoweth right well. My substance was not hid from Thee, When I was made in secret, and curiously wrought in the lowest parts of the earth. Thine eyes did see my substance, yet being unperfect; and in thy book all my members were written, which in continuance were fashioned, when as yet there was none of them.”*

God’s “Book” is an idiom for the memory of God. (See Psalm 56:8; Malachi 3:16) The purpose of this “book” is better understood by reference to the many places where it is termed “the book of life.” It refers to those who, being in God’s memory, will have a resurrection from the dead. Here the members of the body being fashioned in the womb are described as being written in God’s memory “when as yet there were none of them.” This strongly implies that God has planned a resurrection for an individual during the gestation process, even before the organism is brought to full development.

### **“A LIFE FOR A LIFE”**

*EXODUS 21:22-25—“If men strive, and hurt a woman with child, so that her fruit depart from her, and yet no mischief follow: he shall be surely punished, according as the woman’s husband shall lay upon him; and he shall pay as the judges determine. And if any mischief follow, then thou shalt give life for life, eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot, burning for burning, wound for wound, stripe for stripe.”*

That the “mischief” here refers to harm to the child and not to the mother is evident by the fact that in both situations here described the woman is pictured as “hurt.” In the event that “no mischief follow,” the child was evidently born healthy, though premature. But, if there was “mischief,” such as the child being born dead, then the one causing the death forfeited his own life. This being so, God’s perfect Law recognized the miscarried child as a life, and its accidental abortion as murder.

### **A “SLEEPING STILLBORN”**

*JOB 3:11-16—“Why died I not from the womb? Why did I not give up the ghost (spirit) when I came out of the belly? Why did the knees prevent me? Or why the breasts that I should suck? For now should I have lain still and been quiet, I should have slept; then had I been at rest. With kings and counselors of the earth, which built desolate places for themselves; or with princes that had gold, who filled their houses with silver: Or as an hidden untimely birth I had not been: as infants who never saw the light.”*

Job was a man who believed in the resurrection of the dead. (Job 14:14,15) It would have been inconsistent with such hopes to desire to have been a stillborn if there was to be no resurrection of such. In the passage above he describes the death condition as “a rest” where he would have “slept.” The Bible frequently refers to death as “sleep” because when we go to sleep we expect to rise again. In the same way, those who experience “the sleep of death” anticipate life anew in the resurrection.

### **“AN UNTIMELY BIRTH”**

*ECCLESIASTES 6:3—“If a man beget a hundred children, and live many years, so that the days of his years be many, and his soul be not filled with good, and also that he hath no burial; I say, that an untimely birth is better than he.”*

The Bible is full of reassurances of the resurrection of both “those who have done good, and those who have done evil.” (John 5:29) The degree of evil which still permits a resurrection is well pictured by the assurance of the resurrection of the inhabitants of the wicked cities of Sodom and Gomorrah. (Ezekiel 16:55; Matthew 10:15)

Since even these wicked people will receive a resurrection, then, if the condition of the “untimely birth” is “better than he,” it must also receive a resurrection. In order to be raised to a second life, it is obviously necessary to experience a first life. Therefore, the writer of Ecclesiastes considers life to begin within the womb sufficiently early for the “untimely birth,” or stillborn, to have experienced it.

A similar expression of judgment is found in Psalm 58:8, with the same lesson. “As a snail which melteth, let every one of them pass away: like the untimely birth (‘stillborn’—New International Version) of a woman, that they may not see the sun.”

#### **“THE WAY OF THE SPIRIT”**

*ECCLESIASTES 11:5 (Rotherham Translation) –“Just as thou knowest not what is the way of the Spirit, when the body is in the womb of her that is with child, even so canst thou not know the work of God, who maketh all.”*

Here, as in other Biblical references, the workings of the Spirit, “breath of life” (Genesis 2:7), begins within “the womb of her that is with child.” Most of the literal, more accurate translations (such as Rotherham’s, quoted above) connect the first two phrases of the text as one thought. This gives it a similar import to the Scripture examined earlier from Psalm 139:14-16.

#### **“AND ADAM BEGAT”**

*GENESIS 5:3, 4—“And Adam lived an hundred and thirty years, and **begat** a son in own likeness, after his image, and called his name Seth: And the days of Adam after he had begotten Seth were eight hundred years: and he begat sons and daughters.”*

The Genesis account is full of genealogies, listings of fathers and sons for several generations. In all of these genealogical links of chronology, the transfer point of life from one generation to the next generation is when the father “begat” —at conception, not a birth.

#### **SAMSON**

*JUDGES 13:3-5—“And the angel of the Lord appeared unto the woman, and said unto her, Behold now, thou art barren, and bearest not: but thou shalt conceive and bear a son. Now therefore beware, I pray thee, and drink not wine nor strong drink, and eat not any unclean thing: For, lo, thou shalt conceive, and bear a son; and no razor shall come on his head; for the child shall be a Nazarite unto God from the womb; and he shall begin to deliver Israel out of the hand of the Philistines.”*

A “Nazarite” was one who had taken a special vow under the laws of Israel. (See Numbers 6) The fact that Samson’s mother could not drink wine because her unborn child was a Nazarite implies that the child was considered alive—a “Nazarite”—while yet in his mother’s womb. This is further supported by the fact that another portion of the Nazarite vow, the unshaven head, was not required of the mother, but was required of Samson. This indicates that this is not a case where the mother was to be a Nazarite until the baby’s birth, and then Samson was to assume personal responsibility for his vows, but that they were obligatory upon him while he was still in the womb of his mother...

## **SANCTIFIED IN THE WOMB**

*JEREMIAH 1:4, 5—“Then the word of the Lord came unto me, saying, Before I formed thee in the belly I knew thee; and before thou camest forth and out of the womb I sanctified thee, and I ordained thee a prophet unto the nations.”*

God’s dealings with Jeremiah preparing him for his special message to Israel, are Scripturally spoken of as beginning “in the womb.” Similar expressions of the prophet Isaiah and the Apostle Paul. (Isaiah 49:1, 5; Galatians 1:15)

## **“BEFORE ABRAHAM WAS”**

*JOHN 8:58—“Jesus said unto them, Verily, verily, I say unto you, Before Abraham was, I am.”*

Jesus is here replying to the question as to whether he had seen Abraham. In choosing the words for his reply, he said, “Before Abraham was, **I am**,” and not, “Before Abraham was, **I was**.” The tense used here dictates a continuum of existence with no interregnum. Therefore, during the nine months that Jesus was *in utero* he was in existence—alive. The only parentheses in Jesus’ existence, from his creation to eternity, was for the three days immediately following his death, when he was in oblivion. (Acts 2:27)

## **SONS OF GOD—NOW**

*1 JOHN 3:2—“Beloved, now are we the sons of God.”*

Depthful students of the Word of God have long distinguished between the Christian’s present experience of being “begotten” and his resurrection hope of being “born again.” Independent existence begins at birth. Until the Christian receives its spirit body, it does not have such independent existence. Yet, even in the present incomplete “begotten,” or “embryo” condition, the Apostle John fears not to say, “Now are we the sons of God.”

Since the spiritual picture parallels the natural, the inference is clear—at conception we are now considered children—alive.

## **ADAM-ITIS**

*1 CORINTHIANS 15:21, 22—“For since by man came death, by man came also the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive.”*

The law of heredity, an essential in understanding the philosophy of sin atonement, bears out the Old Testament adage that the children die for the sins of the father. (Ezekiel 18: 2; Psalm 51:5) Not only death, but sickness and disease are part of the legacy of sin. All sickness can be properly termed “Adam-itis” because all human weakness and disease can be traced back to the original sin of Adam in the Garden of Eden. For example a pregnant woman who comes down with German measles runs a high risk of aborting her child. This abortion is just one of many which are traceable to Father Adam—Adamitis. The Apostle Paul assures us that all who die “in Adam” will be made alive “in Christ.”

## **KILLING THE SOUL**

*MATTHEW 10:28—“Fear not them which kill the body, but are not able to kill the soul; but rather fear Him which is able to destroy both soul and body in hell.”*

The distinction here is clear. Both God and men can cause the cessation of life—“kill.” However, he who is killed by man is assured of a resurrection from death. His death is only temporary. Only God can destroy life so completely as to blot out even the memory of the person, denying him a resurrection. Oftentimes men have caused human abortions—a negligent doctor, a rejected suitor, an angry husband or lover, to name a few. This text assures us that such people do not have the power to remove life forever. There will be a resurrection. Only God has reserved to himself the authority to permanently remove life. If the aborted fetus in these cases is to have a resurrection, it must be considered a living entity.

## **JOY IN THE WOMB**

*LUKE 1:41:44—“And it came to pass, that, when Elisabeth heard the salutation of Mary, the babe leaped in her womb; and Elisabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit: and she spake out with a loud voice, and said, Blessed art thou among women, and blessed is the fruit of thy womb. And whence is this to me, that the mother of my Lord should come to me? For, lo, as soon as the voice of thy salutation sounded in mine ears, the babe leaped in my womb for joy.”*

Here the “leaping” of John the Baptist in the womb of Elisabeth is specifically stated to be “for joy,” implying responsiveness to an external stimulus. Such ability to respond can only be attributed to live persons.

Child development specialists have repeatedly shown the effects of pre-natal influences. In one experiment, for example, the reading of a foreign language to the expectant mother resulted in greatly accelerated learning that language after birth.

## **“THE BREATH OF LIFE”**

*GENESIS 2:7—“And the LORD God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soul.”*

The “breath of life” in this text obviously does not refer simply to air or oxygen. If this were true, then, in artificial respiration, when air is united with a human organism, life would result. The “breath of life,” or, as some translators put it, “the spark of life,” refers to more than mere oxygen, but the whole process by which that oxygen reaches the various cells of the body, energizing and quickening them. This process is through the circulatory system, by which blood carries oxygen to the various areas of the body. How well this concurs with the Biblical text, “For the life of the flesh is in the blood.” (Leviticus 17:11, 14; Deuteronomy 12:23)

## **BRAIN WAVES**

Today’s high-tech medical world of transplants has raised a host of ethical issues. Among them is the question of what constitutes death for the purpose of

releasing body organs for use as transplants. Science has now come up with a new definition of death. Instead of marking this point by the stoppage of the heart, it is indicated by the cessation of brain waves—brain death.

Psychologists and para-psychologists have conducted a number of experiments demonstrating the presence of brain waves within the womb. This further indicates that life begins within the womb.

### **GENETICS**

The genes which are united at conception form the nucleus of the characteristics which will be possessed by the infant. There is no basic change in this character make-up between conception and one day following birth, merely its further development. Since the preservation of identity in the resurrection is based upon God's memory of the individual's character, and since that character does not change in the various phases of pre-natal development, it seems evident that the embryo and fetus are considered equally alive as the newborn infant.

### **CONCLUSION**

The foregoing discussion, while admittedly not conclusive, presents a strong case for the position that the Bible considers life as beginning near the time of conception. Such testimony does concur with those who say that abortion is the taking of a life.

However, the same evidence indicates that all aborted children will have a resurrection. Therefore, the Scriptures are moot on the question of abortion where a medical decision must be made to save either the life of the baby or the mother.

Another hope-filled thought from the above evidence is the indication that naturally aborted, or still-born children, will have a resurrection from the dead.

How comforting and reassuring is the Bible promise that "all who are in their graves shall hear the voice of the Son of man and come forth"—both "those who have done good" and "those who have done evil."