

# 119

## MINISTRIES

*“The following is a direct script of a teaching that is intended to be presented via video, incorporating relevant text, slides, media, and graphics to assist in illustration, thus facilitating the presentation of the material. In some places, this may cause the written material to not flow or sound rather awkward in some places. In addition, there may be grammatical errors that are often not acceptable in literary work. We encourage the viewing of the video teachings to complement the written teaching you see below.”*

### What the Bible Says About Abortion

In a recent study, conducted by the Cultural Research Center of Arizona Christian University, Christians were surveyed regarding several moral, theological, and cultural issues. One of the issues they were asked about was abortion. The study found that...

44% of self-identified Christians said they think the Bible is “ambiguous in its teaching about abortion.”

-Cultural Resource Center of ACU, “American Worldview Inventory 2020,”  
[www.arizonachristian.edu](http://www.arizonachristian.edu)

That is to say, nearly half of the self-identified Christians who took part in this survey think the Bible is unclear regarding whether or not abortion is immoral. That is a striking statistic! And it reveals something quite tragic: a lot of Christians either don’t read the Scriptures, or they don’t know how to handle them rightly.

#### 2 Timothy 2:15

**Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a worker who has no need to be ashamed, rightly handling the word of truth.**

In this teaching, we are going to explore what the Scriptures reveal about God’s view of abortion. Notice the limited scope of this study: we are not going to get into the philosophical and scientific reasoning for why abortion is immoral. That information is worthy of its own teaching that covers this topic more broadly. This teaching focuses specifically on the *theological* case against abortion for the consideration of Christians who hold to biblical teaching. So, let’s begin.

First, it’s true that there is no biblical commandment that says, “Do not have an abortion.” Interestingly, scholars argue that the Bible’s silence here may actually speak loudly to the obvious immorality of the act, as we’ll discuss later. Nevertheless, the Bible unambiguously condemns abortion in principle. Consider the following argument:

- 1) Scripture prohibits murdering innocent people (Exodus 20:13).
- 2) An unborn child in the womb is an innocent person.
- 3) Therefore, the Bible prohibits murdering an unborn child in the womb.

If (1) and (2) are true, the conclusion (3) logically and inescapably follows.

Every Christian agrees with the first premise of the argument. Murdering innocent people is clearly condemned in the Bible. The main question is whether or not the second premise is true.

Some have tried to argue that the Bible never regards the unborn child as a full person entitled to the basic human right to life, so it's not "murder" to end the unborn child's life through abortion. But this is demonstrably false. Both Old and New Testaments provide evidence that God views the child in the womb as a full person who bears God's image and therefore possesses intrinsic moral worth.

Let's consider some passages in the Old Testament. There are a number of passages that testify of God's personal involvement in the unborn child's development in his or her mother's womb.

For instance, Job speaks of himself and his fellow human begins being fashioned by God in the womb:

**Job 31:15**

[Did not he who made me in the womb make him? And did not one fashion us in the womb?](#)

Isaiah and Jeremiah make similar declarations (Isaiah 44:24; Jeremiah 1:5), as do the Psalms. Psalm 139 is particularly significant on this point:

**Psalm 139:13-16**

[For you formed my inward parts; you knitted me together in my mother's womb. I praise you, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made. Wonderful are your works; my soul knows it very well. My frame was not hidden from you, when I was being made in secret, intricately woven in the depths of the earth. Your eyes saw my unformed substance; in your book were written, every one of them, the days that were formed for me, when as yet there was none of them.](#)

Here, the psalmist was inspired by the Holy Spirit to speak of his own personal identity from conception forward. He sees *himself* as having existed as an unborn child in his mother's womb. The Scriptures here thus portray an unborn child in the womb as a full person, intimately known and formed by God himself.

As John Stott remarks regarding Psalm 139:

The psalmist surveys his life in four stages: past (v. 1), present (vv. 2-6), future (vv. 7-12), and before birth (vv. 13-16), and in all four refers to himself as "I." He who is writing as a full-grown man has the same personal identity as the fetus in his mother's womb.

-John R. W. Stott, "Does Life Begin before Birth?" *ChT* 24, no. 15 (1980): 50

But wait! There's more! The Bible uses the standard Hebrew term for "children" (*habanim*) to describe the fetuses struggling within Rebekah's womb and highlights their humanity and potential (Genesis 25:22). Moreover, in Job, the term commonly used to refer to a "man" (*geber*) is used to describe an embryo at conception (Job 3:3).

These passages alone make it impossible to deny the humanity and personhood of the unborn. However, for good measure, let's also look at the New Testament evidence.

The gospel of Luke testifies of John the Baptist, as an unborn child in his mother's womb, being filled with the Holy Spirit (Luke 1:15) and leaping for joy (Luke 1:41, 44). He is explicitly called a "baby" in the text.

Perhaps the most significant biblical evidence of the humanity and personhood of unborn children is the fact that the Messiah himself was conceived in Mary's womb (Matthew 1; Luke 1). Think about that: the Son of God, the Savior of the world, came into the world as an unborn child.

Days after hearing the news of the Messiah's conception, Mary visited Elizabeth, the mother of John the Baptist. They celebrated the news of the Messiah's coming (Luke 1:39-45).

Was the Messiah just a meaningless clump of cells before his birth? No genuine believer could believe that, and no intellectually honest person could come to that conclusion from the text. The Bible portrays Yeshua as a full human person at the point of his conception. He went through the same stages of human development in the womb as every other human being. The biblical testimony of Messiah's moral worth as an unborn child in the womb, therefore, demonstrates the moral worth of every unborn child in the womb.

The Biblical evidence for the personhood of the unborn seems pretty clear. But there are two passages that skeptics sometimes bring up to try to argue that the Bible regards the fetus as not fully human. One of those passages is Exodus 21:22-25. Let's take a look:

#### **Exodus 21:22-25**

When men strive together and hit a pregnant woman, **so that her children come out**, but there is no harm, the one who hit her shall surely be fined, as the woman's husband shall impose on him, and he shall pay as the judges determine. But if there is harm, then you shall pay life for life, eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot, burn for burn, wound for wound, stripe for stripe.

Those wanting to find support for the morality of abortion take the clause "so that her children come out," in this passage, as referencing a miscarried fetus. They argue that since only a fine is to be imposed upon the offender if the woman miscarries, the fetus is regarded as merely a possession and not really human. Only if "there is harm"—that is, presumably, only if the woman herself gets hurt or dies—does the principle of equivalent punishment apply. This would seem to indicate that the Bible does not consider the fetus to be on par with the mother in moral worth.

However, as scholar Richard Davidson explains:

[T]his interpretation fails to take seriously the precise linguistic evidence of the text.

-Richard M. Davidson, *Flame of Yahweh: Sexuality in the Old Testament* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 2007), p. 495

The text actually implies that these children that come out are still alive, not stillborn. Davidson highlights several Hebrew expressions that demonstrate clearly why this passage does not regard the fetus as less than fully human.

1. The noun *yeled*, “child,” is the common Old Testament term for a fully human child from infancy to the age of twelve.
2. The word for “stillborn child”—not used in this passage—is *nepel*, “untimely birth,” not *yeled*.
3. The verb *yasa*, “to go or come out,” is a term regularly used to describe the ordinary live birth of children. When referring to a stillbirth, the verb is always accompanied by some form of the verb *mut*, “to die”; the latter verb does not appear in Exodus 21:22.
4. The technical word for miscarriage in the Old Testament is not *yasa* but *sakal*, “to miscarry,” and the latter verb is employed only two chapters later in Exodus 23:26. Had Moses intended to mean “miscarriage” in this passage, he certainly would have used the technical term *sakal*.
5. The term *ason*, “harm/calamity/hurt,” appearing immediately after the clause “her children come out,” with no Hebrew expression *lah*, “to her,” restricting the harm to the woman, is indefinite, referring at least to the prematurely born child and probably to either mother or child.
6. In v. 22, then, if no harm has come to *either mother or child*, only a fine is imposed upon the striker, presumably to compensate for the physical or mental discomfort he has caused. In v. 23, if harm (from serious to fatal injury) has come to *either mother or child*, then the law of equivalent punishment comes into effect.

\*See pages 493-497 of Richard M. Davidson’s book, *Flame of Yahweh*, for a full analysis of the passage.

So, the ESV rendering of the passage that we quoted earlier is accurate when it translates the clause “so that her children come out.” This is clearly referring to premature live birth, not a miscarriage. Based on these exegetical points, Davidson concludes:

[T]he *lex talionis* (law of just retribution) of vv. 23-24 applies to the fetus equally as much as to the mother, and the fetus is therefore granted under the law the status of a full human being just as is the mother. And if the fetus is fully human, then the implication for abortion is also straightforward: the passage gives no support to the legitimacy of this practice. In fact, taking the life of a human fetus is considered homicide, just as is taking the life of the mother.

-Richard M. Davidson, *Flame of Yahweh: Sexuality in the Old Testament* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 2007), p. 497

Indeed, far from contradicting the plethora of passages we covered earlier, Exodus 21:22-25 fully affirms the humanity and personhood of the unborn child in the womb. As Meredith Kline writes:

This law, found in Exod 21:22-25, turns out to be perhaps the most decisive positive evidence in Scripture that the fetus is to be regarded as a living person.

-Meredith G. Kline, “Lex Talionis and the Human Fetus,” *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society*, Vol. 20, No. 3 (1977), p. 193

The other passage that skeptics sometimes bring up is found in Numbers 5:11-31. We cover this passage in detail in our teaching, [Understanding the Test for Adultery \(Numbers 5:11-31\)](#). But to give a quick summary, when a husband suspects his wife of adultery but has no proof, the Torah says he can bring his wife to the priests to undergo a ritual trial. During this trial, the woman drinks the “water of bitterness”—a mixture of water with some dust from the floor of the tabernacle and parchment fragments (Numbers 5:17, 23-24). If she is innocent, the water has no effect on her. However, if she is guilty, God divinely curses her by causing her thigh to “fall away” and her body to “swell,” causing

“bitter pain” and making her abdomen swell (Numbers 5:21-22, 27).

Skeptics make the assumption that the woman in this passage is pregnant and that the concoction she is made to drink causes her to miscarry. In other words, the priest essentially performs an abortion on the woman by having her drink the water of bitterness.

Again, we go into more detail about what this divine curse actually involved in our teaching, [\*Understanding the Test for Adultery \(Numbers 5:11-31\)\*](#). But the important point here is that there is nothing in the text itself that even hints a fetus is killed as part of this divine curse. A couple of reasons can be given to demonstrate this.

- 1) Nowhere in the text is there any indication that the woman is even pregnant. That idea is simply read into the text by skeptics, but it’s an unwarranted assumption.
- 2) Nothing inherent in the “water of bitterness” would affect the woman’s body or cause a miscarriage, and this is proven by the fact that it would not affect her if she were innocent.

Unfortunately, one English translation, the NIV, does describe this divine curse as causing the woman’s womb to miscarry. But this translation is extremely misleading. The Hebrew word translated “miscarry” in the NIV is *naphal*, which means to fall. The word “womb” is *yarek*, which means thigh or side. Only the NIV indicates a miscarriage occurring here. All other English translations say, “thigh fall away,” “thigh rot,” and so forth. Moreover, neither the Septuagint’s rendering of this verse nor Josephus’ description of the curse (*Antiquities* 3.11.6) indicates a miscarriage. This idea rests solely on one English translation. And since the text itself simply doesn’t support that interpretation, the NIV’s rendering should be rejected.

As we’ve seen, the biblical evidence is clear. According to the Bible, an unborn child in the womb is a fully human person. Therefore, it would be an act of murder to end his or her life through abortion.

But what about the fact that the Bible never *explicitly* condemns the actual act of abortion? Sure, the Bible condemns murder, and abortion clearly falls within that category biblically. In fact, this was the understanding of early Christians. For example, the Didache, an influential Christian writing dated by many to the late first/early second century, does condemn abortion explicitly (Didache 2.1-2). But why not the Bible itself?

As we mentioned earlier, scholars have argued that the Bible’s silence in this regard may actually be significant evidence *against* the idea that abortion was permitted in Israel. The Bible teaches that children are a gift from God (Psalm 127:3). That one would deprive themselves of such an immense blessing was unthinkable. As Meredith Kline writes:

The most significant thing about abortion legislation in Biblical law is that there is none. It was so unthinkable that an Israelite woman should desire an abortion that there was no need to mention this offense in the criminal code.

-Meredith G. Kline, “Lex Talionis and the Human Fetus,” *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society*, Vol. 20, No. 3 (1977)

There is one ancient Near Eastern law code known as the Middle Assyrian Laws that *does* explicitly condemn abortion. In fact, a woman guilty of aborting her unborn child was to be impaled and refused a proper burial (*Middle Assyrian Laws*, A.53).

Commenting on what we know about the attitude toward abortion in the ancient Near East, Davidson writes the following:

As far as is presently known, abortion was not generally practiced in Canaan, which may explain why there is no explicit reference to abortion in Scripture, either in biblical law or in narrative. In light of the radical denunciation and repudiation of abortion implied in the Middle Assyrian Laws from the late second millennium B.C.E., the absence of any pentateuchal legislation dealing directly with abortion may be significant. It must be remembered that the biblical law collections, like their counterparts elsewhere in the ancient Near East, were incomplete and did not deal with every facet of life and practice.

-Richard M. Davidson, *Flame of Yahweh: Sexuality in the Old Testament* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 2007), p. 491

As Davidson points out, we shouldn't be surprised that the Torah doesn't address every single facet of life. The Torah itself admits as much since it says to establish judges in order to make rulings on various civil issues that would come up (e.g., Deuteronomy 17:8-13). David Instone-Brewer gives some general insight into how we ought to think about the Torah's silence on a given practice in light of what we learn from other ancient Near Eastern law codes:

Because of the similarity of the Pentateuch with other ancient Near Eastern law codes, we must assume that where the Old Testament is silent, there was broad agreement with the prevailing culture.

-David Instone-Brewer, *Divorce and Remarriage in the Bible: The Social and Literary Context* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 2002), p. 21

So according to scholars, we can assume that where the Torah is silent on a given practice, there would have been broad agreement between Israel and their neighbors. This is why the Torah explicitly condemns the specific practices known in Canaan, such as child sacrifice, incest, and so forth. Those were evil practices known to be practiced in Canaan, so it was necessary for YHWH to explicitly mention them. But abortion is not known to have been practiced in Canaan, or really hardly anywhere in the ancient Near East, so it makes sense that there is no explicit mention of it in the Torah.

Remember, the Torah was not given in a cultural vacuum, so some things did not necessarily need to be spelled out when they were similar. So, since evidently everyone at the time knew that abortion was a heinous crime, there was no need to address it in the Torah explicitly. Based on what we know about how abortion was viewed in the ancient Near East, if someone was ever convicted of performing an abortion in ancient Israel, we have every reason to think the Israelite judges would have classified the act as murder and ruled accordingly.

Abortion later did become a culturally accepted practice in the Greco-Roman world, which explains why early Christians saw a need to address it explicitly in writings like the Didache, as we mentioned.

Of course, today, the western world legally permits the practice of abortion in most cases. Activists fight for even fewer legal restrictions on abortion, saying it's a mother's right! And sadly, many professing Christians are neutral on this issue, or worse, standing alongside the pro-abortion activists in some misguided stance for social justice. Meredith Kline gives a good summary of what our culture's

acceptance of abortion says about us:

[I]nduced abortion was so abhorrent to the Israelite mind that it was not necessary to have a specific prohibition dealing with it in the Mosaic law. The Middle Assyrian laws attest to an abhorrence that was felt for this crime even in the midst of the heathendom around Israel, lacking though it did the illumination of special revelation. For in those laws a woman guilty of abortion was condemned to be impaled on stakes. Even if she managed to lose her own life in producing the abortion, she was still to be impaled and hung up in shame as an expression of the community's repudiation of such an abomination. It is hard to imagine a more damning commentary on what is taking place in enlightened America today than that provided by this legal witness out of the conscience of benighted ancient paganism!

-Meredith G. Kline, "Lex Talionis and the Human Fetus," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society*, Vol. 20, No. 3 (1977), p. 200-201

How far we've fallen. Ancient pagans, some of whom would sacrifice their own children in religious rituals, had more regard for the lives of the unborn than our culture does today. We should be ashamed.

Thanks be to God that even in the depths of such depravity, his love reaches us when we cry out to him. When we confess and repent of our sins—even abortion and our cowardice to stand against such an obvious evil—God forgives and cleanses us. Nevertheless, as believers, we must not be silent when it comes to the issue of abortion. Now forgiven, we are called to stand for justice and righteousness. We are called to care for the "least of these," and unborn children in the womb certainly qualify as the "least of these."

How do we do this on a practical level? Standing against abortion might mean speaking out in public or on social media. It might mean protesting at abortion clinics, reaching out to women who are considering abortion and ministering to and praying for them. It might mean voting for certain leaders who will enact pro-life legislation. It might mean praying fervently, every day, for an end to abortion. Or all of the above.

In conclusion, contrary to the uninformed opinions of many self-identified Christians, the Bible unambiguously condemns abortion. The Bible prohibits murdering innocent people, and unborn children in the womb are innocent people as established by both Old and New Testaments. While Exodus 21:22-25 is sometimes used to suggest that the Bible regards children in the womb as less than fully human, we've learned that it actually teaches the opposite. Regarding the curse upon the adulteress in Numbers 5:11-31, contrary to what some have claimed, we've learned that there is nothing in the text itself indicating abortion at all. We've also learned that the silence in the Torah regarding abortion may indicate not neutrality, *but unspoken agreement* with the surrounding cultures of Israel that repudiated abortion. It simply wasn't necessary to explicitly condemn abortion in the Torah because it was so obviously wrong that it didn't even need to be mentioned.

As believers, we have no excuse. We must loudly affirm the moral worth of unborn children in the womb, and we must stand against the evil of abortion.

*We pray you have been blessed by this teaching.*

*Remember, continue to test everything.*

*Shalom!*

*For more on this and other teachings, please visit us at [www.testeverything.net](http://www.testeverything.net)*

**Shalom, and may Yahweh bless you in walking in the whole Word of God.**

**EMAIL:** [Info@119ministries.com](mailto:Info@119ministries.com)

**FACEBOOK:** [www.facebook.com/119Ministries](http://www.facebook.com/119Ministries)

**WEBSITE:** [www.TestEverything.net](http://www.TestEverything.net) & [www.ExaminaloTodo.net](http://www.ExaminaloTodo.net)

**TWITTER:** [www.twitter.com/119Ministries#](https://www.twitter.com/119Ministries#)