

# Biblical Perspectives on Unborn Children

BY RANDY ALCORN

Humans are made in the image of God (Genesis 1:27; James 3:9). God creates each and every individual (Malachi 2:10). The Bible never measures personhood by age, stage of development, or mental, physical, or social skills (Exodus 4:11; Isaiah 45:9-11).



## CAN WE TELL THE MOMENT OF EACH PERSON'S CREATION BY GOD?

Science offers a clear answer that perfectly complements the teaching of Scripture. Speaking of the early stages of a child's development in the womb, Dr. Alfred M. Bongiovanni, professor of obstetrics at the University of Pennsylvania, states, "Human life is present throughout this entire sequence from conception to adulthood...any interruption at any point throughout this time constitutes a termination of human life...I am no more prepared to say that these early stages represent an incomplete human being than I would be to say that the child prior to the dramatic effects of puberty is not a human being. This is human life at every stage."

Dr. Jerome LeJeune, genetics professor at the University of Descartes in Paris, states, this "is no longer a matter of taste or opinion. Each individual has a very neat beginning, at conception."

Professor Micheline Matthews-Roth of Harvard University Medical School argues, "It is scientifically correct to say that an individual human life begins at conception."

Every indication is that before fertilization, the individual (with her unique DNA) did not exist, and from that moment she does.

## THE BIBLE GIVES THEOLOGICAL CERTAINTY TO THE BIOLOGICAL EVIDENCE.

Job graphically described the way God created him before he was born (Job 10:8-12). The person in the womb was not *something* that might become Job, but *someone* who was Job, simply a younger, smaller version of the same man. Isaiah and Jeremiah were not just potential persons but *actual* persons while still in the womb (Isaiah 44:2; Jeremiah 1:5).

Psalms 139:13-16 paints a graphic picture of the intimate involvement of God with a preborn person. David says to his Creator, "You knit me together in my mother's womb." Each person, regardless of his parentage or handicap, has been personally knitted together by God in the womb. All the days of his life have been planned out by God before any have taken place (Psalm 139:16).

Every person sinned "in Adam," and is therefore a sinner from the moment his life begins (Romans 5:12-19). David says he was not simply a sinner from birth, but "sinful from the time my mother conceived me" (Psalm 51:5). Who but an actual person can have a sin nature? Morality can be ascribed not to a thing, but only a person. That there is a sin nature at the point of conception proves there *must* be a person present at the point of conception.

When Rebekah was pregnant with Jacob and Esau, "The *babies* jostled each other within her" (Genesis 25:22). The word "babies" is the same Hebrew word used for already-born children. Hosea 12:3 says "In the womb he [Jacob] grasped his brother's heel; as a man he struggled with God." It was the same Jacob in the womb, younger and smaller, who was later the man who struggled with God.

Luke 1:41 & 44 refer to the unborn John the Baptist, who was at the end of his second trimester (sixth month) in the womb. The word translated "baby" in these verses is the Greek word *brephos*. It is the same word used for the already-born baby Jesus (Luke 2:12,16) and for the children brought to Jesus to receive his blessing (Luke 18:15-17). It's also the same word used in Acts 7:19 for the newborn babies killed by Pharaoh.

To the writers of the New Testament, like the Old Testament, whether born or unborn a baby is a baby, a person is a person. The preborn John the Baptist responded to the presence of the preborn Jesus, when Jesus (judging by the time it would take Mary to get to Elizabeth) was no more than ten days beyond his conception (Luke 1:41). Since implantation doesn't begin until six days after conception and is not completed until twelve days, it is probable that Jesus was not even fully implanted in his mother's womb when the preborn John responded to his presence.



Scripture says Mary “was found to be with child through the Holy Spirit.” The angel told Joseph, “what is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit” (Matthew 1:18-20). To be pregnant, even at the very earliest moments after conception, is to be *with child*, not simply with what might become a child.

Where did God first “became flesh and dwell among us”? 99% of Christians will say “Bethlehem,” but that is wrong. Christ became flesh when the Holy Spirit conceived a child in Mary—that was at *Nazareth*, nine months before she traveled to Bethlehem.

### IN LIGHT OF THE FULL HUMANITY OF PREBORN CHILDREN, WE MUST DO NOTHING TO TAKE THEIR LIVES (EXODUS 20:13).

Furthermore, we should do all in our power to protect them (Proverbs 24:11-12; Proverbs 31:8-9). God jealously maintains His sole prerogatives over human life and death (Deuteronomy 32:39; 1 Samuel 2:6). To take that power into our hands is literally to play God.

Child sacrifice is condemned in Scripture. Only the most degraded societies tolerated this evil, and the worst of these defended and celebrated it as if it were a virtue. While Scripture condemns the shedding of innocent blood (Deuteronomy 19:10; Proverbs 6:17; Isaiah 1:15; Jeremiah 22:17), the Bible regards the killing of defenseless children as particularly heinous (Leviticus 18:21; 20:1-5; Deuteronomy 12:31). The prophets were outraged that some Jews sacrificed their children. They warned it would surely result in the devastating judgment of God on their society (Jeremiah 7:30-34; Ezekiel 16:20-21, 36-38; 20:31; compare 2 Kings 21:2-6, 16 with 2 Kings 24:3-4 and Jeremiah 15:3-4).

### CHRISTIANS THROUGHOUT CHURCH HISTORY HAVE AFFIRMED WITH A UNITED VOICE THE HUMANITY OF PREBORN CHILDREN AND THE DUTY TO PROTECT THEM.

The second-century *Epistle of Barnabas* speaks of “killers of the child, who abort the mold of God. It states, “You shall love your neighbor more than your own life. **You shall not slay a child by abortion.** You shall not kill that which has already been generated” (*Epistle of Barnabas* 19.5).

*The Didache*, a second-century catechism for young converts, states, “Do not murder a child by abortion or kill a new-born infant” (*Didache* 2.2). Tertullian said, “It does not matter whether you take away a life that is born, or destroy one that is coming to the birth. In both instances, the destruction is murder” (*Apology*, 9.4). Jerome called abortion “the murder of an unborn child” (*Letter to Eustochium*, 22.13). Augustine warned against the terrible crime of “the murder of an unborn child” (*On Marriage*, 1.17.15). Origen, Cyprian, and Chrysostom stood alongside every prominent theologian and church leader in condemning abortion.

John Calvin said, “The fetus, though enclosed in the womb of its mother, is already a human being and it is a monstrous crime to rob it of life... If it seems more horrible to kill a man in his own house than in a field, because a man’s house is his place of most secure refuge, it ought surely to be deemed more atrocious to destroy a fetus in the womb before it has come to light.”

Christ’s disciples failed to understand how precious children were to him, when they rebuked those who tried to bring them near him (Luke 18:15-17). Jesus called the children to him and said, “Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these.” (Luke 18:15-17).

### THE BIBLICAL VIEW IS THAT CHILDREN ARE A BLESSING AND GIFT FROM THE LORD (PSALM 127:3-5).

Modern society treats children as inconveniences and liabilities—the less of them the better. We must learn to love children as does God who “defends the cause of the fatherless” (Deuteronomy 10:18): He commands us, “Defend the cause of the weak and fatherless; maintain the rights of the poor and oppressed. Rescue the weak and needy; deliver them from the hand of the wicked” (Psalm 82:3-4).

It is clear what Bible-believing Christians should *think* of abortion. As we contemplate what we should *do* about it, we might begin with the words of our Lord Jesus: “Whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did for me . . . whatever you did *not* do for one of the least of these, you did *not* do for me” (Matthew 25:40, 45).