

Are There Really Verses in the Bible That Support Abortion?

Many of us know the biblical case against abortion. But are there other verses that bring a different perspective on abortion?

On the pro-life side, we note that Rebekah was told that two nations were in her womb, pointing to the personhood and potential of her unborn children (Genesis 25:21-23; see also Jeremiah 1:4-5).

Similarly, John the Baptizer leaped in his mother's womb when Miriam (Mary) arrived, with the baby Jesus in her womb (Luke 1:39-43; see also 1:15, where John would be filled with the Spirit even from his mother's womb).

And verses like Psalm 139:13-16 speak of how the Lord carefully knit us together while we were still in the womb.

But are there other verses that might point in another direction?

There are two main passages that often come up for discussion in this context, Exodus 21:22-25 and Numbers 5:11-31. But upon close examination, neither of them supports a pro-abortion position in the least.

Let's look first at the passage in Exodus. In the ESV it reads:

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.

In contrast, the NRSV translates:

When people who are fighting injure a pregnant woman so that there is a miscarriage, and yet no further harm follows, the one responsible shall be fined what the woman's husband demands, paying as much as the judges determine. If any harm follows, then you shall give life for life, eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot, burn for burn, wound for wound, stripe for stripe.

The question, then, is simple: Does the Torah consider the unborn baby to be a human life, in which case any harm done to the baby will be repaid in kind (as in eye for eye, etc.)? Or does the Torah consider the unborn baby to be more like a possession (say, like a cow or a lamb), in which case, a miscarriage is not equivalent to murder?

There is serious debate among Hebrew scholars concerning this, and while I personally lean strongly towards the translation found in the ESV (compare the NET's "and her child is born prematurely"), we can't be absolutely dogmatic.

But either way, how can this verse, even as translated in the NRSV, be used to support abortion? Even following the NRSV (and other similar translations), a crime has been committed, and the guilty party will be fined. So, if we applied the concept to our society today, abortion would be punishable by the law, all the more so if it was done intentionally. (Again, the case described in Exodus 21 speaks of a pregnant woman being struck accidentally while two men are fighting.)

Also, since we have other verses in the Bible, cited at the beginning of this article, pointing to the personhood of the child in the womb, we can make an excellent case for the

rendering found in the ESV and NET (and many other translations).

As for the passage in Numbers, it speaks of a ceremony which takes place when a husband suspects that his wife has committed adultery. In that case, she is forced to take a public oath and drink a unique concoction, with the priest saying, “‘the LORD make you a curse and an oath among your people, when the LORD makes your thigh fall away and your body swell. May this water that brings the curse pass into your bowels and make your womb swell and your thigh fall away.’ And the woman shall say, ‘Amen, Amen.’” (Num 5:21b-22, ESV)

Here, we are told by some defenders of abortion, it is God Himself who performs the abortion with the drink that the wife ingests, causing this pregnant woman to lose her child. How, then, can we argue that God is pro-life?

As ludicrous as this argument sounds, it is often raised, so let’s take a moment to rebut it.

First, God is the righteous Judge, and if He deems it right to take a life, that is His prerogative (see Deuteronomy 32:39; note also the narrative in 2 Samuel 11-12, where David commits adultery and the baby that is born dies as a result of judgment).

Second, and more germane to the text here, the passage says absolutely nothing about the woman being pregnant, nor does it speak of her miscarrying. Nothing in the Hebrew text points in that direction at all.

Third, even if the drink allegedly caused miscarriages (which, again, the text does not reference or speak of at all), if the woman had not committed adultery, it would have no effect on her. This would mean that the drink was not some kind of abortifacient.

Case closed.

But let's not end here. Having responded to the misuse of these verses, let's remind ourselves of this beautiful passage from Luke's Gospel, describing Mary's pregnancy:

In those days Mary arose and went with haste into the hill country, to a town in Judah, and she entered the house of Zechariah and greeted Elizabeth. And when Elizabeth heard the greeting of Mary, the baby leaped in her womb. And Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit, and she exclaimed with a loud cry, 'Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb! And why is this granted to me that the mother of my Lord should come to me? For behold, when the sound of your greeting came to my ears, the baby in my womb leaped for joy' (Luke 1:39-44, ESV).

Those unborn babies are tiny little human beings in our Father's sight. We stand with Him when we stand for them.

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