### The Beginning of Human Life

One of the most stupendous miracles of nature is the birth of a new child. However, in our day many of the unborn never experience life on earth because of the widespread practice of abortion. The key issue here is the answer to the question whether life begins at conception or later.

In this work, we defend the position that life begins at conception. This thesis finds support both from medical data and biblical truths. We will deal primarily with the biblical side of the question, but will also briefly survey the medical evidence.

From the world of medicine, we learn that when the female ovum and the male sperm combine, a new entity, the zygote, appears, which possesses a different genetic makeup than either the father or the mother. This means that a new, unique individual has been conceived. This is confirmed by the formation of antibodies in the mother against the fetus – the mother’s body recognizes an “alien” object in the uterus. We also note that from a very early stage, the fetus shows many clearly human features and its heart begins to beat – evidences that a new person has appeared.[[1]](#footnote-1)

From the biblical perspective, we note several key passages of Scripture in support of our position. In Psalm 139:13-14, we read, “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.” In this text, we observe David using the personal pronouns “my” and “me” to refer to his condition as a fetus – he was already a distinct person while still in his mother’s womb. David is not merely expressing himself in accordance with his ancient cultural worldview on the topic, but is writing inerrant Scripture inspired by the Spirit.

Luke 1:36 is also significant for our discussion: “And behold, even your relative Elizabeth has also conceived a son in her old age.” Note that Elizabeth conceived a *son*. The fetus was already considered a full-fledged member of the family. Again, this verse does not simply reflect the cultural worldview of the time, but these words were spoken by an angel from heaven.

In Jeremiah 1:5, personal pronouns are again used in reference to a fetus: “Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, and before you were born I consecrated you; I have appointed you a prophet to the nations.” Here the one speaking is not a human expressing a cultural view, or even an angel from heaven, but the Lord Himself. Paul was also called from his mother’s womb (Gal 1:15). A person can have a divine calling even before birth.

In Luke 1:41-44, we see that at Mary’s greeting to Elizabeth the child in Elizabeth’s womb leaped for joy. This shows that even before birth, a child can possess spiritual sensibilities, which is another sign of genuine personality. Additionally, unlike our previous examples, here no one is expressing an opinion about the status of the fetus, but the text is describing an objective historical event.

On the other hand, we must take into consideration the passage in Exodus 21:22-24:

If men struggle with each other and strike a woman with child so that she gives birth prematurely, yet there is no injury, he shall surely be fined as the woman's husband may demand of him, and he shall pay as the judges {decide}. But if there is {any further} injury, then you shall appoint {as a penalty} life for life…

Some translations interpret this event as a miscarriage, which would imply that fetus is of less value than the woman, since the punishment is less severe. An examination of the original text will prove helpful here. The phrase “gives birth prematurely” translates the Hebrew יָצְאוּ יְלָדֶיהָ (*yatseu yeladeiha*). In nearly all other instances where this phrase is used, is refers to the birth of a normal, living child (Gen 25:26; 38:28-30; Job 3:11; 10:18; Jer 1:5; 20:18). In addition, the Hebrew language has a specific term for a miscarriage – שֵׁכַל (*shehal,* see Gen 31:38; Ex 23:26; Hos 9:14; Job 21:10). Therefore, we conclude that a premature birth, not a miscarriage, is in view. We also note that the one “injured” during the struggle is not specified. The word “injury” could refer either to the mother, or to her premature child. Consequently, the punishment would be the same regardless of who suffered the injury.

This passage, then, does not lower the status of a fetus in comparison to an adult person. Also important to note is that the injury in this text was unintentional, while abortions are intentional acts of violence. Therefore, one cannot use this text in support of the practice of abortion. We do need to clarify that in one instance (Num 12:12) the Hebrew verb יָצַא (*yatsa*), featured in our Exodus passage, does indicate a miscarriage. However, unlike the other examples cited above, the context of Numbers 12 makes clear that a miscarriage is meant. Therefore, this exceptional case does not challenge our interpretation of Exodus 21.

Comparing the biblical teaching with other opinions expressed in antiquity, we discover the following. In the Code of Hammurabi, one who unintentionally causes a miscarriage will pay a fine. On the other hand, according to the laws of Middle Assyria, the offender could be executed if the fetus dies. The Hebrew philosopher Philo of Alexandria expressed the view that if the fetus was not already “formed,” that is, had a human appearance, the offender was fined. If the fetus appeared human, the offender was executed.[[2]](#footnote-2) Curiously, the Septuagint translation of Exodus 21 corresponds to Philo’s view. Nonetheless, our views are not based on human opinions, but on the revealed Word of God.

1. Munyon T. The Creation of the Universe and Humankind // Horton S. M. Systematic Theology. – Rev. Ed. – BookMasters. Kindle Edition. – P. 272-273. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Philo, *The Special Laws III*, 19.108-109. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)