# **Reverend Warnock’s Position**

Josh Taylor / General

**Bible Passage(s) Exodus**

# **Instructions**

• Will you take your Bibles and turn to ...?

• Please search the Scriptures with us. We’re in the New Testament, which is in the last quarter of the Bible. Don’t be afraid to use your index.

• If you don’t have a Bible but have a smartphone, you can download the Y-O-U Version Bible App. Once you download it, you can go to the “More” tab, tap “Events,” and find Mt. Carmel Baptist Church, and you can see the Scripture, notes, quotes, and references.

# **Capture**

• Reverend Warnock who is running for the U.S. Senate in Georgia claimed in an August podcast interview that abortion is “consistent with” his beliefs as a minister and vowed to fight to keep it legal if he wins the election.

* The Southern Baptist Convention addresses the “Sanctity of Life” every year on the third Sunday of January. Given that we are in the midst of a tumultuous election, I pray to bring scriptural clarity to this issue now.

# **Significance**

* Two weeks ago, on December 21, 2020, an opinion contributor of thehill.com, *Marik von Rennenkampff, wrote, “*Pro-choice pastors like Raphael Warnock have the Bible, history on their side.”
* <https://thehill.com/opinion/campaign/531126-pro-choice-pastors-like-raphael-warnock-have-the-bible-history-on-their-side>
* Is that true?

# **The Question**

## **Does the pro-choice position have the Bible and history on its side?**

### Objection #1: The Bible does not mention abortion.

**Response #1:** There is ***no*** indication that premeditated abortion was tolerated in ancient Israel.

* “The most significant thing about abortion legislation in Biblical law is there is none. It was so unthinkable that an Israelite woman should desire an abortion; there was no need to mention this offense in the criminal code.”
* “Behind each discussion is assumed a basic Jewish orientation to life: first, the duty and desire to populate the earth and ensure both Jewish survival and the divine presence; second, a deep sense of the sanctity of life as God’s creation, a respect extending in various ways to life in all its manifestations and stages; and, finally, a profound horror of blood and bloodshed. These themes undergird the entire Jewish approach to abortion.”
* As we observed at the outset, induced abortion was so abhorrent to the Israelite mind it was unnecessary to have a specific prohibition dealing with it in the Mosaic law.
* For the question of abortion, perhaps the most significant passage of all is found in Exodus 21:22–25.
* In Exodus 21:18–36, there are laws concerned with cases of criminal negligence.
* 22 “When men get in a fight and hit a pregnant woman so that her children are born prematurely but there is no injury, the one who hit her must be fined as the woman’s husband demands from him, and he must pay according to judicial assessment. 23 If there is an injury, then you must give life for life, 24 eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot, 25 burn for burn, bruise for bruise, wound for wound. **(Ex 21:22–25)**
* There are two interpretations.
	+ Pro-Choice interpreters envisage either (1) a miscarriage only and the penalty is a monetary settlement according to the woman’s husband’s assessment, or (2) in addition to the miscarriage, the woman suffers injury or dies, and the penalty prescribes capital punishment, “life for life,” for the woman.
		- Since there is a difference in the penalties for destroying the fetus and killing the woman, the fetus is regarded as mere property, not a living person like the woman.
	+ Pro-Life interpreters envisage both (1) if no injury is caused to the mother but it does cause her to give birth prematurely to a live uninjured child, the assailant must give whatever the husband demands. (2) if the mother or child suffers injury or death, the penalty must be a just equivalent.
		- The fetus is thus treated as a living person, just like the mother.
* **In the “Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society Volume 20,” Meredith Kline writes, “**It will appear that even if it were granted that the first penalty has reference to a miscarriage and the second penalty to harm suffered by the woman, as the dominant interpretation suggests, it would still not follow that the penalty for the destruction of the fetus was different in kind or even in degree from the penalty for harming the woman.”
* 28 “When an ox gores a man or a woman to death, the ox must be stoned, and its meat may not be eaten, but the ox’s owner is innocent. 29 However, if the ox was in the habit of goring, and its owner has been warned yet does not restrain it, and it kills a man or a woman, the ox must be stoned, and its owner must also be put to death. 30 If instead a ransom is demanded of him, he can pay a redemption price for his life in the full amount demanded from him. 31 If it gores a son or a daughter, he is to be dealt with according to this same law. 32 If the ox gores a male or female slave, he must give thirty shekels of silver to the slave’s master, and the ox must be stoned. **(Ex 21:28–32)**
* The expression for exacting the fine, “***demands***,” literally “lays on him,” is also found in Exod 21:28–32. There the owner of the ox is said to be liable to the death penalty (v 29), but since the offense was one of criminal negligence rather than premeditation the Law allows that a ransom for the redemption of his forfeited life be laid on him (v 30).
* Thus if the offense involved a loss of human life but it was a matter of criminal negligence, not of premeditated murder, the life-for-life formula did not preclude the application of the ransom procedure customary in such cases.
* Put another way: in both cases, where a death is involved, the penalty may be understood as demanding a ransom for the offender’s forfeited life.
* Therefore no matter whether one interprets the first or second penalty to refer to a miscarriage, there is no difference in the treatment accorded the fetus and the woman.
* It’s not because life is devalued; it's because of criminal negligence.
* Exodus 22 gives only ***implicit*** evidence for the question of willful abortion.

## Objection #2 The first Christians’ had divergent views on abortion.

Response #2: In ***early*** Christianity, ***abortion*** is prohibited.

While the apologists praised Christians’ refusal to imitate pagan practice, ***Hippolytus*** (ca 170–ca 236) knew subtle Roman influence on the church and the church’s failure to criticize that influence. Pope Callistus himself approved of a Roman law allowing concubine marriages, even though such marriages often resulted in unwanted pregnancies. After 222, Hippolytus wrote about the effect of Callistus’s laxity:

*Women, reputed believers, began to resort to drugs for producing sterility, and to gird themselves round, so to expel what was being conceived on account of their not wishing to have a child either by a slave or by any paltry fellow, for the sake of their family and excessive wealth. Behold, into how great impiety that lawless one has proceeded, by inculcating adultery and murder at the same time!*
Faced with growing immorality, especially among wealthier believing women, Hippolytus continued to hold forth the orthodox belief that abortion is murder.

Similarly, for ***Cyprian*** (ca 200/210–258), orthodox belief and practice were closely related. This popular writer was not at all surprised to learn that Novatian was not only schismatic but also immoral, abusing widows, orphans, his father, and even his wife:

The womb of his wife was smitten by a blow of his heel; and in the miscarriage that soon followed, the offspring was brought forth, the fruit of a father’s murder. And now he dares to condemn the hands of those who sacrifice, when he himself is more guilty in his feet, by which the son, who was about to be born, was slain?

Other writings of the early period of Christianity, such as the ***Didache***, expressly condemn abortion. Didache 2:2, in an exposition of the second great commandment (“Love thy neighbor as thyself”) as part of the “Way of Life,” the author lists prohibitions modeled on the Ten Commandments, including: “Thou shalt not murder a child by abortion/destruction.”

The fetus was viewed as a neighbor with the same rights—including the right to life—that the neighbor would have.

So when did Christians diverge? The great majority of Christian theologians followed the Septuagint reading of Exodus 21:22 regarding the unformed and formed fetus.

When the translators of the Septuagint (the Greek Old Testament) came to the Hebrew text of Exodus 21:22–25, they knew the philosophical debate between Plato, who said life begins at conception, and the Stoics, who said life begins at birth, and aware also of the Aristotelian distinction between the formed and the unformed fetus. The Septuagint translators rendered the Hebrew word (“harm”) as “form.” The phrase “there is no harm” became “there is no form.”

The change of “harm” to “form” makes the penalty apply explicitly to injuring the fetus, not the woman. Augustine observes that “unformed fetuses are like seeds which have not fructified.” Augustine’s view prevailed: “Abortion was homicide only when the fetus was formed.” (11) From N. F. Gier, God, Reason, and the Evangelicals

So what?

* Have you ever said, “The Bible says…” And then didn’t quote a book, chapter, and verse. Or, In the Bible, we learn that…” Or the Bible describes…If you have ever made one of these statements, or anything similar to them, you have practiced systematic theology.
* Wayne Grudem: Systematic theology is any study that answers the question, “What does the whole Bible teach us today?” about any given topic.”
* We’re not saying a verse says, “Thou shalt not commit abortion.” Or “Life begins at conception.” We’re saying, taking the whole of the Biblical canon into account, “Life begins at conception, and abortion is murder.”
* **Does the Bible teach that the fetus is the image of God? Yes, for 3 reasons.**
* 1. The ***image*** of ***God*** is passed on seminally.
	+ Moses, who taught the covenant people that God created Adam “in his own image,” later taught that this image was passed on seminally. He recorded that **“Adam fathered a son in his own likeness and according to his image” (Gen. 5:3). The verb everywhere else means to “father a child.”**
		- Without a doubt, then, the author intends his reader to understand that through sexual intercourse—seminally—the essential feature of humanness, that which relates man to God and separates him from the rest of nature, is handed down.
* 1. Our ***sinful*** nature is passed on seminally.
	+ **David lamented, “The wicked are estranged from the womb; they go astray as soon as they are born, speaking lies” (Ps. 58:3).**
	+ **Job said, “Who can bring a clean thing out of an unclean? Not one” (Job 14:4).**
		- These passages suggest that our sinful spiritual state is passed on from generation to generation. Therefore, they implicitly teach that the fetus is a spiritual, moral being.
* 3. We are in a state of ***sin*** at the ***time*** of conception.
	+ **In tracing the origin of his sin with Bathsheba, David lamented, “Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity, and in sin did my mother conceive me.” Psalm 51:5**
		- E. R. Dalglish: “The psalmist is relating his sinfulness to the very inception of life; he traces his development beyond his birth … to the genesis of his being in his mother’s womb—-even to the very hour of conception.”
* Therefore, we conclude that the image of God is already present in the fetus. and therefore to be accorded the same protection to life granted every other human.
* What about “The Bible does not actually say anything at all on the topic. On this issue, there is no divine revelation to be had.” It is *“*theologically unfounded.”? All those statements are false.
* Given the ***whole*** of the Bible, “The fetus is made in the ***image*** of ***God***, and so should be protected.”

# **Take-Aways**

* There is ***no*** indication that premeditated abortion was tolerated in ancient Israel.
* Exodus 22 gives only ***implicit*** evidence for the question of willful abortion.
* In ***early*** Christianity, ***abortion*** is prohibited.
* Given the ***whole*** of the Bible, “The fetus is made in the ***image*** of ***God***, and so should be protected.”
* Does the pro-choice position have the Bible and history on its side? By *no* means.

# **Pray**

“Dear Jesus, I confess I am a sinner and deserve judgment and hell, but I believe You love, came to this earth for me, lived a sinless life, and died on the cross for my sins. I believe God raised you from the dead to forgive me. Please forgive me, come into my life, and grant me eternal life in You name. Help me to glorify you in all I do. In Jesus’ name, Amen.”

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