

Abortion and the Ancient Practice of Child Sacrifice

Andrew White, M.D.

Dr. White is a 1978 graduate of the Michigan Medical School now in the private practice of family medicine in the North Shore of Boston. He is also currently studying for a Master of Divinity at Gordon-Conwell Seminary.

Despite considerable biblical evidence already summoned to support a strong pro-life position, more scriptural testimony seems to be needed to convince some Christians that anything less than such a position is unbiblical. One objection frequently raised to a dogmatic stand against abortion is that the Bible never specifically addresses the issue. The reason for this omission has been pointed out by the Old Testament scholar Meredith Mine who, commenting on the lack of abortion legislation in biblical law says, "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."¹

There was, however, a rite performed in ancient Israel which has many parallels to the modern practice of abortion and is specifically addressed in the Scriptures. It was the rite of child sacrifice and Moses said it was one of the "detestable things the Lord hates" (Deuteronomy 12:31). In this paper the largely neglected parallels between the ancient rite of child sacrifice and the modern practice of abortion will be examined in detail.

ARCHEOLOGICAL and EXTRA-

BIBLICAL LITERARY DATA

Before the biblical texts which address the practice of child sacrifice are examined, it will be helpful to draw on some of the archeological and extra-biblical literary data for the background they provide.

In 1921 the largest cemetery of sacrificed infants in the ancient Near East was discovered at Carthage. It is well established that this rite of child sacrifice originated in Phoenicia, ancient Israel's northern neighbor, and was brought to Carthage by its Phoenician colonizers. Hundreds of burial urns filled with the cremated bones of infants, mostly newborns but even some children up to age six years old, as well as animals have been uncovered at Carthage.

They were buried there between the 8th century B.C. and the fall of Carthage during the third Punic War in 146 B.C. On the burial monuments that sometimes accompanied the urns, there was often inscribed the name or symbol of the goddess Tanit, the main Phoenician female deity, and her consort Ba'al Hammon.' Infants and children were regularly sacrificed to this divine couple.

Fulfillment of a vow was probably the most frequent reason an infant or child was sacrificed as witnessed by the third century B.C. Greek author Kleitarchos (paraphrased by a later writer):

*Out of reverence for Kronos (the Greek equivalent of Ba'al Hammon), the Phoenicians, and especially the Carthaginians, whenever they seek to obtain some great favor, vow one of their children, burning it as a sacrifice to the deity if they are especially eager to gain success.*³

A typical example of an inscription follows:

*"To our lady, to Tanit, the face of Ba'al and to our lord, to Ba'al Hammon that which was vowed (by) PN son of PN son Of PN. Because he (the deity) heard his (the dedicant's) voice and blessed him."*⁴

Thus fulfillment of a vow before or after obtaining a special favor from the gods, a favor that brings blessing or success to the dedicant, appears to be the most common reason for child sacrifice. Occasionally, however, at times of civic crisis, mass child sacrifice was practiced as attested by the first century B.C. Greek historian Diodorus Siculus who reported the response of the Carthaginians to their army's defeat by

Agathocles in 310 B.C.:

*Therefore the Carthaginians, believing that the misfortune had come to them from the gods, betook themselves to every manner of supplication of the divine powers . . . In their zeal to make amends for their omission, they selected two hundred of the noblest children and sacrificed them publicly.*⁵

The actual rite of child sacrifice at Carthage has been graphically described by Diodorus Siculus:

*There was in their city a bronze image of Cronus extending its hands, palms up and sloping toward the ground, so that each of the children when placed thereon rolled down and fell into a sort of gaping pit filled with fire.*⁶

Plutarch, a first and second century A.D. Greek author, adds to the description that:

*the whole area before the statue was filled with a loud noise of flutes and drums so that the cries of wailing should not reach the ears of the people.*⁷

There is conflicting evidence regarding the

actual cause of death of the victims. Some reports suggest that they were burned alive⁸ while other reports suggest that the infants and children were slaughtered first.⁹ The victims, themselves, were members of both the wealthy mercantile and estate-owning class as well as the lower socioeconomic class as attested by the titles of the dedicants on the burial monuments.¹⁰ Occasionally, however, the upper class would substitute lower class children for their own by purchasing them from the poor and then sacrificing them as Diodorus Siculus reports:

*in former times they (the Carthaginians) had been accustomed to sacrifice to this god the noblest of their sons, but more recently, secretly buying and nurturing children, they had sent these to the sacrifice.*¹¹

Two inscriptions at Carthage even show that occasionally the parents would sacrifice a defective child hoping to later receive a healthy one as a substitute. In one inscription a man named Tuscus says that he gave Ba'al "his mute son Bod'astart, a defective child, in exchange for a healthy one." ¹² Child sacrifice probably became a standard practice for both religious and sociological reasons. Diodorus Siculus suggests that the:

ancient myth that Cronos did away with his own children appears to have

*been kept in mind among the Carthagians through this observance.*¹³

The second and third century A.D. Roman lawyer and Christian apologist who was a native North African and spent most of his life in Carthage, Tertullian, wrote:

*Saturn (the latinized African equalivant of Ba'al Hammon) did not spare his own children; so, where other people's were concerned, he naturally persisted in not sparing them; and their own parents offered them to him, were glad to respond...*¹⁴

According to the ancient myth, Saturn selfishly swallowed up the first five of his children in order to prevent his destined dethronement by one of them.¹⁵ Hoping to gain Saturn's favor and thus his blessing, the Carthaginians worshipped Saturn by imitating him. Serving a god with ungodly attributes, the Carthaginians were willing to submit to his murderous demands. Indeed Saturn's demands may have assisted the Carthaginians in their own self-serving plans. For the Syro-Palestinian archeologists Lawrence Stager and Samuel Wolff suggest that "Among the social elite of Punic Carthage the institution of child sacrifice may have assisted in the consolidation and maintenance of family wealth. One hardly needed several children parceling up the patrimony into smaller and smaller pieces . . . for the artisans and

commoners of Carthage, ritual infanticide could provide a hedge against poverty. For all these participants in this aspect of the cult, then, child sacrifice provided "special favors from the gods."¹⁶ This suggestion is supported by archeological evidence at Carthage that the practice of child sacrifice flourished as never before at the height of its population as well as civilization."

BIBLICAL CITATIONS

Child sacrifice was not confined to Phoenicia, Carthage and the western Mediterranean world. It was also practiced by the Canaanites and through the process of religious syncretism by some Israelites. The earliest reference to child sacrifice in the Bible is found in Leviticus where the practice is addressed by Moses in connection with Molech:

Do not give any of your children to be passed through (the fire) to Molech for you must not profane the name of your God. I am the Lord.

(Lev. 18:21; see also 20:1-5)

In I Kings 11:7, Molech is identified as "the detestable god of the Ammonites" and recent archeological evidence in the former territory of the Ammonites from the period of the Conquest supports biblical testimony that child sacrifice was practiced in Jordan roughly contemporarily with Moses."¹⁸ The Hebrew word *Molech* is the same Semitic root as the Punic word **mulk** which was found inscribed on several

burial monuments at Carthage giving linguistic evidence for the continuity between the practice of child sacrifice in Canaan and at Carthage. But whereas at Carthage the word refers to the sacrificial offerings including human sacrifice, in Leviticus it refers to the god who demands child sacrifice.¹⁹ The "passing through" refers to sacrificing by burning in a fire.²⁰ For this "passing through to Molech" (same Hebrew words in Leviticus and Jeremiah) took place later in Israel's history in the region of the high places of Ba'al in the Valley of Ben Hinnom in Jeremiah 32:35. This murderous scene was described by the Lord through the mouth of Jeremiah in earlier chapters:

For they have forsaken me and made this a place of foreign gods; they have burned sacrifices in it to gods that neither they nor their fathers nor the kings of Judah ever knew and they have filled this place with the blood of the innocent. They have built me the high places of Ba'al to burn their sons in the fire as offerings to Ba'al - something I did not command or mention, nor did it enter my mind. So beware, the days are coming, declares the Lord, when people will no longer call this place Topheth (possibly derived from an Aramaic word meaning hearth or

fireplace but here referring to the precinct of child sacrifice)" or the Valley of ben Hinnom, but the Valley of slaughter.

(Jeremiah 19:4-6; see also 7:31,32)

The history of child sacrifice in ancient Israel and God's response to the practice can be uncovered by examining the biblical texts that address it in the Pentateuch, historical books and prophetic writings. In the Pentateuch, Moses warns the Israelites who will soon enter the land of Canaan (Leviticus 18:3 and 20:21-24) where they will be exposed to the cult of Molech not to sacrifice any of their children to the god:

The Lord said to Moses, say to the Israelites: "Any Israelite or any alien living in Israel who gives any of his children to Molech must be put to death. The people of the community are to stone him. I will set my face against that man and I will cut him off from his people; for by giving his children to Molech he has defiled my sanctuary and profaned my holy name. If the people of the community close their eyes when that man gives one of his children to Molech and they fail to put him to death, I will set my face against that man and

his family and will cut off from their people both him and all who follow him in prostituting themselves to Molech.

(Leviticus 20:1-5; see also 18:21)

The penalty for sacrifice to Molech is harsh, i.e., stoning to death (Lev. 20:2); for it is a serious offense against the Lord.

1. It defiles God's sanctuary (Lev. 20:3) and since His holy presence cannot abide in a place polluted by sin it threatens abandonment by God of His people.

2. It profanes God's holy name making God appear less than the holy God that He is by inferring that He is a God who desires, or at least permits, child sacrifice.

3. God knew that the practice of child sacrifice to Molech was a form of spiritual prostitution (Lev. 20:5). God's relationship to His people is a close personal one with a human analogy in the sexual intimacy of marriage. God, of course, expects the exclusive commitment of marriage, not the pick-and-choose relationships of prostitution.

4. In Deuteronomy, God through Moses rejects child sacrifice even if allegedly done in the worship and service of God Himself (Deut. 12:29-31). In reference to the nations of Canaan that Israel was about to invade and dispossess (12:29) and the worship of their gods (12:30), Moses commands:

You must not worship the Lord your God in their way because in worshipping their gods, they do all kinds of detestable things the Lord hates. They even burn their sons and daughters in the fire as sacrifices to their gods. (Deuteronomy 12:31)

With remarkable discernment Moses recognized that such unacceptable service can sometimes begin not as a conscious determination to do ungodly things but as an "ensnaring" by other nations and their gods (12:30).

Two of Moses' admonitions against child sacrifice are found in the stipulation section of the loosely covenant treaty form of Leviticus 18:21 (Lev. 18:21) and the more rigid covenant treaty form of Deuteronomy²³ (Deut. 12:29-31). In the covenants made between God and Israel, the Lord expected His people to obey the civil, moral and religious stipulations. His commands were to be obeyed because of allegiance to His Lordship and out of a sense of gratitude for His great acts of redemption (Lev. 18:2,3 and Deut. 5:1,2,6 and 12:1).

Failure to obey the covenantal stipulations is failure to give God full allegiance as Lord and failure to respond appropriately to His gracious acts of redemption.

Disregarding the covenant stipulations is a serious offense, some of which, including child sacrifice, are so grievous as to be punished by capital punishment which is to be done by the entire community (Lev. 20:2,3). If the offense goes undetected by the community, God Himself threatens to "set my face against" and "cut off" the offender (Lev. 20:3) - probably a threat of premature death.²⁴ So detestable to God is child sacrifice that He even threatens to set His face against and cut off those who, though not participants in the practice, "close their eyes" to the crime (Lev. 20:4,5). Further, the warning not only applied to God's covenant people but to any non-Israelite living in Israel (Lev. 20:2). Child sacrifice was not one of the many tribal customs aliens who lived in Israel were permitted to practice.

In these Pentateuchal passages dealing with child sacrifice the offense is recognized as a sin in at least three different ways. As noted above it was seen as a sin against God, i.e. in defiling His sanctuary, in profaning His holy name, in spiritual prostituting to Molech and in ungodly worship of the Lord Himself. But child sacrifice was also perceived as a sexual sin and/or sin against the family as well as a sin against the community. In Leviticus 18 (see also Lev. 20:9ff) the stipulation against child sacrifice is listed among various sexual sins, e.g. incest (18:6ff), adultery (18:20), homosexuality (18:22) and bestiality (18:23). It is not obvious from the immediate context of Leviticus 18 and 20 why child sacrifice is linked to various illicit sexual practices. It is probable, however, that the worship of

Molech not only involved child sacrifice but the pagan custom of cultic prostitution. In Isaiah 57:9, "Molech" (*Melech* in Hebrew. But it must be remembered that vowel notation was a later addition by Masorete scholars to the received consonantal text). is mentioned. Earlier in the chapter "those sacrificing their children" (57:5b) is in parallel with "those burning with lust" (57:5a). They are also described in 57:3 as "offspring of the adulterer and the prostitute." The Hebrew word for adulterer is masculine while the prostitute is feminine, indicating that the children are the offspring of an adulterous father and a prostituting mother. But the phrase is not to be taken literally. Rather, the declared attributes of the parents are in fact used to characterize the offspring themselves." The connection between child sacrifice and cultic prostitution is even clearer in Ezekiel where we read:

And you took your sons and your daughters whom you bore to me and sacrificed them as food to the idols. Was your prostitution not enough? You slaughtered my children and made them pass through (the fire) to the idols.

(Ezekiel 16:20,21)

Thus the Old Testament scholar Moshe Weinfeld links cultic prostitution with child sacrifice in Isaiah and Ezekiel saying, "The children born of cultic prostitution associated with Molech were presumably delivered to the idolatrous priests, even as

the offspring of a regular marriage may have been handed over to Molech."²⁶ Given that some of the children offered to Molech were conceived illegitimately during adulterous/prostituting affairs, it seems probable that child sacrifice offered a convenient way to dispose of the consequences of these aberrant sexual practices.

Another possible reason for grouping child sacrifice with illicit sexual practices is that they are all sins against the family. Of the sexual sins listed together in 20:10ff, the Old Testament scholar Walter Kaiser, Jr., says: "Every assault against an individual here is simultaneously an attack on the very existence of the family."²⁷ Kaiser sees these sexual sins all as sins against the family since they disrupt normal family relationships. It is possible then that child sacrifice, which was clearly an assault against the family, came to be associated with other stipulations that protected the family. Since the family was the foundation of Israelite society, any threat to the family was a threat to the community as well. Thus, the community was to be vigilant in guarding against the practice and was to take the severest community action against any offenders, i.e., stoning to death.

Despite the covenantal stipulations and warnings against child sacrifice, Scripture records that some Israelites did in fact practice child sacrifice. Of Ahaz, the 8th century B.C. king of Judah, we read:

He walked in the ways of the kings of Israel and even made his son pass through

the fire, following the detestable ways of the nations the Lord had driven out before the Israelites.
(2 Kings 16:3)

Sadly Ahaz's grandson Manasseh followed in his footsteps (2 Kings 21:6). But these accounts of child sacrifice were not isolated as recorded by Jeremiah (see above). Being a prophet of God it was Jeremiah's obligation to prosecute on behalf of God the covenant lawsuit against those who had broken the covenant. The evidence against the Israelites was incontestable for it was publicly visible to all. As the Lord's mouthpiece, Jeremiah testifies against Judah:

They have set up their detestable idols in the house that bears my Name and have defiled it They have built the high places of Topheth in the Valley of Ben Hinnom to burn their sons and daughters in the fire - something I did not command nor did it enter my mind.

(Jeremiah 7:30,31; see also 19:4,5)

Because of this offense for which Israel is corporately responsible, Jeremiah predicts

disaster (7:32-34 and 19:1-3), 6-15). If only the people would repent, disaster could be thwarted (Jeremiah 18:5-11). But the Israelites were a "stiff-necked" people who would not listen to God's words (Jer. 9:15; see also 18:12; cf 18:5-11). They had forsaken their God to serve other gods even to the extent that they would sacrifice their own children spilling "the blood of the innocent" (Jer. 19:4). Manasseh's grandson Josiah had tried to bring about reformation among the Israelites. After renewing the covenant between God and His people (2 Kings 23:1-3), Josiah:

desecrated Topheth which was in the Valley of Ben Hinnom, so no one could use it to make his son or daughter pass through the fire to Molech.
(2 Kings 23:10)

But Josiah's reformation was short-lived as evidenced by Jeremiah's prophetic witness (see above). God used Rome to judge Carthage in 146 B.C., bringing an end to child sacrifice there. Hundreds of years earlier God used Babylon to judge Israel when the Babylonians destroyed Jerusalem, leveling God's temple which signified God's just abandonment of His people, and leading Israel into captivity. While exiled in Babylon, Ezekiel reminded the two prostituting sisters Oholah (representing Samaria in Ezekiel 23:4) and Oholibah (representing Jerusalem) of the reason they had been exiled. In confronting the two with "their detestable practices" the Lord through Ezekiel said:

they have committed adultery and blood is on their hands. They committed adultery with their idols, they even made the children they bore to me pass through the fire) as food for them.

(Ezekiel 23:36,37)

Idolatry had not disappeared by New Testament times, but took on a broader meaning. Commenting on the New Testament authors' understanding of idolatry, Herbert Schlossberg notes that "a man can place anyone or anything at the top of his pyramid of values, and that is ultimately what he serves. The ultimacy of that service profoundly affects the way he lives."²⁸ Physical idols were still common in New Testament times, e.g. I Corinthians 8:4,5. However, in Pauline theology idolatry is also recognized as any worshipping or serving the creature rather than the Creator which is equivalent to exchanging the truth of God for a lie (Romans 1:25 cr 1:23).²⁹ Placing anything above the Creator and His truth is idolatry, for in this idolatry the creature's erroneous value judgments are substituted for the Creator's correct ones. Sadly, people know the truth but suppress it (Romans 1:18). For God has revealed His nature, power and laws both in the visible world and in the hearts and consciences of humanity (Romans 1:19,20, 2:14,15). But mankind is on a downward spiral of depravity and destruction that begins with devaluing the Creator and His truth and ultimately leads to an outpouring of God's

just wrath at the final judgment (Romans 1:24-32, 2:5,8,9,12). Even now mankind is experiencing God's wrath as He gives men over to the consequences of their sin (Romans 1:27,26,28). Apart from God's gracious intervention, all mankind faces the present and future revelation of God's just wrath. But as recipients of God's righteousness through faith in Christ Jesus, we have been justified (Romans 1:17, 3:21-28). Having been justified by His grace, our lives must not be conformed to his world's idolatrous values but be transformed by the renewing of our minds to God's perfect will (Romans 12:2).

PARALLELS OF ABORTION AND CHILD SACRIFICE

At the risk on the one hand of pointing out obvious parallels and on the other hand of suggesting parallels which some may say are forced, we compare the ancient practice of child sacrifice with the modern practice of abortion. However, before going any further it should be noted that the parallels between the two have been recognized for centuries. Tertullian, for example, commenting on the Roman practice of infanticide by comparing it to the Carthaginian practice of child sacrifice admonishes:

there is no difference as to baby killing whether you do it as a sacred rite or just because you choose to do it.

In the same context Tertullian describes the Christian attitude towards both abortion and infanticide saying:

For us murder is once for all forbidden; so even the child in the womb, while yet the mother's blood is still being drawn on to form the human being, it is not lawful to destroy. To forbid birth is only quicker murder. It makes no difference whether one take away the life once born or destroy it as it comes to birth. He is a man, who is to be a man, the fruit is always present in the seed.³⁰

The most obvious parallel between the rite of child sacrifice and the practice of abortion is the sober fact that the **parents actually kill their own offspring**. There are however many other parallels. At Carthage the main reason for sacrificing a child was to avert potential dangers in a crisis or to gain success through fulfilling a vow. Today many times when a woman faces an unwanted pregnancy, abortion seems to be the only way to resolve the crisis she finds herself in. The potential danger to reputation, education, career, etc., become overwhelming. To avert the seemingly terrifying consequences of carrying a pregnancy to term, the woman may turn to abortion as a means of escape. Another woman may experience much less of the anxiety and fear that accompany a crisis. She may simply see the pregnancy as an intrusion into her self-serving lifestyle and an obstacle in the way of the road to her success. Sadly this woman's offspring must be sacrificed so that she can continue uninterrupted with her plans for the future.

It is no secret that in American society **extramarital sexual intercourse** (fornication and adultery) is the cause of most pregnancies that end in abortion. Pregnancy is a risk many are willing to take knowing that any undesired consequences can be eliminated by abortion. The theologian Carl Henry recognizes this fact in calling abortion "the horrendous modern immolation of millions of fetuses on the alter of sex gratification."³¹ As suggested earlier, child sacrifice in Canaan may have been a convenient way to dispose of the consequences of the illicit sexual practice of temple prostitution associated with the cult of Molech. If so, the modern practice of men irresponsibly engaging in sexual intercourse with women to whom they do not intend to commit themselves and provide for parallels the wayward Israelite man engaging in extramarital relations with a temple prostitute. In both cases the men leave the women to bear the consequences of their aberrant sexual practices. New England Christian Action Council executive director John Rankin rightly calls this **irresponsible behavior of men towards women** as "the ultimate male chauvinism."³²

As noted earlier, child sacrifice may have been a means of population control at Carthage. At present around the world abortion is sanctioned, even encouraged, by some societies as a means of **population control**. In China, communist party agents actually impose great social and economic pressure on couples to abort their offspring if they already have one child. In this country, the sanctions are more subtle. Presumably, Medicaid-

funded abortions afford the poor equal access to medical care, but one wonders whether some wealthy policy makers hope to control population growth among the poor under the guise of good will. In this there is an intimation of a parallel to the Carthaginian practice of the wealthy buying the poor's offspring to sacrifice in place of their own children. Apart from state funding, occasionally both the rich and the poor will abort later pregnancies if they feel their families are large enough. As at Carthage, socioeconomic concerns often play a prominent role in the decision.

Sometimes the Carthaginians sacrificed defective children in exchange for healthy ones. It is now standard medical practice to do an amniocentesis at an early stage of pregnancy when **congenital abnormalities** are suspected. If an impairment is confirmed, the parents are advised to consider terminating the pregnancy. To carry to term and raise a defective child is not expected of the parents since they can exchange the frail one they now have for a healthy one in the future. In some states obstetricians who fail to advise their patients of the need for an amniocentesis can be successfully sued for malpractice on the legal grounds that the delivered infants are "wrongful life."³³

Even the actual rite of child sacrifice has modern parallels in the medical techniques used to perform abortions. In the saline abortion **the dying infant is chemically burned** as it thrashes about for minutes to hours before finally succumbing. In the suction abortion **the loud whir** of the vacuum pump muffles the sound of the

mother crying out in pain and sadness and the ripping and gushing sound of the infant being torn piecemeal from the womb.

Finally, **the flourishing of abortion** in modern America, like child sacrifice in ancient Carthage, at the height of its civilization is an unmistakable parallel. The words written by P. Mosca at the conclusion of his doctoral dissertation dealing with child sacrifice might well be written of abortion today, ". . . it is impossible to deal with this subject at any length without coming to terms with the human dimension: how could a culture so well developed morally, intellectually and materially tolerate so 'abominable' a custom? How could a sophisticated people sanction what seems to be such a barbaric practice for so long a time? How at the most visceral and critical level could human parents bring about the destruction of their own child?"³⁴

One religious truth emerges in comparing ancient child sacrifice to modern abortion, i.e., people become like the gods/God they worship. The Carthaginians worshipped Ba'al Hammon, equivalent to Kronos and Saturn. Not surprisingly they became like him, willing to sacrifice their children to avert potential danger and gain success in their self-serving endeavors. Modern autonomous man worships himself and is willing to abort his own offspring in order to resolve crises and achieve his own goals. In serving the idolatrous self, men become more and more like the self-serving idol they worship, i.e. sinful man. They are willing to disregard any of God's gracious laws in order to accomplish their

own ends. In their self-idolatry men have set themselves on a downward spiral of depravity and destruction from which only God's gracious mercy can deliver them.

In contrast to those who worship themselves, those who worship the holy God become holy. God sets Himself before His people as the standard of righteousness, "Be holy because I the Lord your God am holy" (Lev. 19:2). In serving this righteous God, men and women become more and more like Him in righteousness. Of course, even the holy people of God have faith not in their own righteousness, but in the saving work of their righteous Lord, Jesus Christ.

CONCLUSIONS

Since there are many parallels between ancient child sacrifice and modern abortion, it is reasonable to conclude that the attitude of our unchanging God towards abortion today is similar to His attitude towards child sacrifice in the past. What then can we rationally surmise is God's judgment regarding the practice of abortion both among Christians and those who are not His people?

Like child sacrifice in ancient Israel, the practice of abortion by Christians is spiritual prostitution to an idol, defiles God's sanctuary and profanes His holy name. God alone is the Author of life and it is not the creature's prerogative to question the Creator's wisdom in bringing to life a fellow human being at conception. Whenever men disregard their Creator's wise judgment by destroying His innocent

creation, they are serving another god. They are, in fact, spiritually prostituting themselves to the idolatrous self whom they believe is wiser in its value judgments. Some values which are put forward to justify abortion are clearly idolatrous, e.g., the mother's right to choose, which is placed at the top of the pyramid of values by those who call themselves pro-choice. Other idolatrous values are more subtle, e.g., empathy for a mother's suffering in the midst of the crisis arising from an unwanted pregnancy or concern for the quality of life of a defective fetus. Both of these later values are good in themselves but become idolatrous when they abrogate the Creator's wise judgment in creating human life. It is not as though God fails to realize in creating some human beings that they may become a source of conflict in an unplanned conception or that a handicapped person will indeed face difficulties.

Whenever Christians disregard the Creator's true value judgments, they dethrone God and by their sin defile the temple in which He dwells, the temple of their own body (see I Corinthians 6:19). Dethroned and defiled by the idolatrous sin of abortion, God threatens to abandon the wayward Christian unless there is repentance. For God will not dwell in a temple in which another god is enthroned and a sanctuary polluted by sin. And the Christian who approves of or participates in the sin of abortion not only affects himself but he profanes God's holy name. People intuitively know that a man's attitude and behavior reflect his values. The Christian claims that God's authoritative

Word determines his values. If a Christian then speaks or acts in away that is contrary to that Word, he brings dishonor to God's name. For to those who do not know God, the Christian is their chief witness to the Word of God. And the Christian who approves of or participates in the practice of abortion is testifying to the world that his God condones the practice. He is in reality bearing false witness, for by his attitude and behavior he infers that the Creator consents to His creatures destroying innocent fellow creatures. This false witness actually implies through his testimony that God is at odds with Himself. For in creating a human being God has clearly judged it to be of value. If God approved of abortion, He would be essentially saying that his value judgments are sometimes wrong.

Many Christians who accept or take part in the practice of abortion have not made a conscious decision to sin and bring dishonor to God by condoning idolatrous values. Regardless of the motive, however, these Christians are unacceptably serving God. Indeed God hates the detestable sin of abortion. For not only is abortion a sin against God and His innocent creation but it is a sin against the family and community as well. Scripture throughout teaches that children are a blessing from the Lord and that loving nurture is the godly response of parents toward their offspring. Abortion is the rejection of the God-given role to parent His creation. For an unmarried woman unable to cope with the doubly difficult role of single parenting, the child may be God's gift through her to a barren couple within the community. Whether

God's blessing is received and lovingly nurtured by the biologic parents or given to adoptive parents, the birth of a child is a blessing to the family and community.

Often abortion is the evil solution to the consequences of a sexual sin. Whether a pregnancy results from fornication or adultery, where the mother is a guilty participant in the sin, or a pregnancy results from rape or incest, where the mother usually is the guiltless victim of another's sin, abortion is an ungodly solution. For the Sovereign Redeemer is able to bring about good where there was evil. A new creation resulting from a sexual sin is an extraordinary witness to this redemptive truth.

Sadly many Christians refuse to completely submit to the Lordship of the Creator and fail to appreciate the redemptive power of their God to save man from the full consequences of sin. The defective fetus is the victim of that original sin which resulted in the fall of all creation. A mother may be the victim of her own or another's sexual sin or the victim of corporate societal sin, e.g., unjust poverty. In all of these situations abortion has no redeeming character; for God never deals with sin or its consequences by countering it with sin but with righteousness. The unhealthy child should be loved and cared for more not less because of its weakness. The pregnant woman should be counseled to do what is right and given assistance in every possible way to support a godly decision to nurture in her body God's creation during its first nine months of life. Christians must always affirm, both by word and deed, the

sovereignty of the Creator and recognize His power to righteously redeem mankind from the results of sin.

Up to this point we have been trying to discover God's attitude towards abortion among Christians, based on Scripture's testimony of His attitude towards child sacrifice among the Israelites. We now turn to God's judgment regarding abortion among those who are not Christians and the Christian response to the practice among them.

As previously noted in the theocratic nation of Israel, some non-Israelite customs were tolerated and some, like child sacrifice, were not. Today God's people in the United States do not live in a theocracy; rather, they live in a democratic state. As such, Christians must determine, based on the principles of God's law, when they should become actively involved in the democratic process to restrict the behavior of some individuals in the interest of other individuals and society-at-large and when they should tolerate different values and customs. Abortion is clearly a practice which is intolerable and must be restrained by the state. For abortion is the denial of the inalienable God-given right to life" of an innocent human being and it is an attack at the very foundation of our society, i.e., the family and community. Even many of those who are not Christians acknowledge that abortion is wrong. For God's law is written on the hearts of men and women to which their conscience bears witness (see Romans 2:14). Others have suppressed God's truth by substituting their own self-serving idolatrous values. The truth of

God's power and divinity have been revealed in creation (see Romans 1:18ff). But men and women have suppressed this truth and their rejection of this revelation of God is clearly evident in the sin of abortion. For scarcely is the power and divinity of God more clearly seen than in His creative power bringing to life each human being, everyone made in His own divine image (see Genesis 1:27). No man-made technology has the power to create life, much less a human life stamped with the divine imprimatur. Rather, through the medical technology of abortion mankind rebels against the creative power of the Almighty by destroying the divine image-bearers. No, abortion is not acceptable as practice by Christians or non-Christians and must not be tolerated by this or any other society. Those individuals who fail to heed God's law by condoning abortion will surely face God's judgment if they remain impenitent. Even those who do not condone abortion but fail to take action against it will face judgment. For as noted previously in Leviticus both the Israelite who sacrificed his child to Molech and those who closed their eyes to the sin faced the judgment of God. And if a society as a whole persistently rejects God's laws it will surely corporately face God's judgment. The city of Carthage and the nation of Israel are but two of many historical testimonies to the outpouring of God's wrath against unrelenting corporate sin.

Something is happening in this land which God did not command nor did it enter His mind - this place is being filled with the blood of the innocent. So beware, for

blood is on our hands and God will set his face against us unless we repent and are cleansed by his merciful forgiveness.

This is what the Lord says:

Look I am preparing a disaster for you and devising a plan against you. So turn from your evil ways, each one of you, and reform your ways and your actions.

(Jeremiah 18:11)

Oh, that we might not respond like ancient Israel.

It is no use. We will continue with our own plans, each of us will follow the stubbornness of his evil heart.

(Jeremiah 18:12)

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2. Harden, D., *The Phoenicians*, 1962, p. 88.
3. For translation see Mosca P.G., *Child Sacrifice in Caananite and Israelite Religion*, Ph.D. dissertation, Harvard University, 1975, p. 22.
4. Stager, L.E. and Wolff, S.R., "Child Sacrifice at Carthage - Religious Rite or Population Control?", *Biblical Archaeology Review*, Jan./Feb. 1984, p. 45.

5. Siculus, Diodorus, *The Library of History*, Book XX:14, *The Loeb Classical Library*.

6. Ibid.

7. Plutarch, *De superstitione* 171, *The Loeb Classical Library*.

8. Mosca, P.G., op. cit., p. 27, Mosca translates Kleitarchos' paraphraser from *Scholia* to Plato's *Republic* as follows: "There stands in their midst a bronze statue of Kronos, its hands extended over a bronze brazier, the flames of which engulf the child. When the flames fall upon the body, the limbs contract and the open mouth seems almost to be laughing until the contracted body slips quietly into the brazier. Thus it is that the 'grin' is known as 'sardonic laughter,' since they die laughing."

9. de Vaux, R., *Studies in Old Testament Sacrifices*, 1964, p. 81. de Vaux says that slaughter preceding the cremation "has been well established by J. Guey in *melanges d'archeologic et d'histoire*, 1937, pp. 94-99."

10. Stager, L.E. and Wolff, S.R., op. cit., pp. 45, 47, citing P.G. Mosca's epigraphic work documented in his Ph.D. dissertation op. cit.

11. Siculus, Diodorus, op. cit., See also Plutarch op. cited where he says "Those who had no children would buy some little ones from poor people and cut their throats as if they were so many lambs or young birds."

12. Kennedy, C., "Queries/Comments," *Biblical Archeologie Review*, May/June 1984, p. 20, citing J. Feuvier's article "Une Sacrifice d'Enfant chez les Numides," *Annuaire de l'Institut de Philologic et d'Histoire Orientales et Slave*, 1953.

13. Siculus, Diodorus, op. cit.

14. Tertullian, *Apologeticus IX: 4* *The Loeb Classical Library*.

15. Hamilton, E., *Mythology*, 1940, pp. 65, 66.

16. Stager, L.E. and Wolff, S.R., op. cit., pp. 50,51

17. Ibid., pp. 40-42. The archeologic evidence to support their conclusion is the greater proportion of human remains to animal remains in the most recent burial urns.

18. Wenham, G.J., *The New International Commentary on the Old Testament - The Book of Leviticus*, 1979, p. 259. There are text critical problems with I Kings 11:7. It may be that *Milcum* should be substituted for *Molech* in this verse (see I Kings 11:5, 33 in Hebrew)

19. Some scholars suggest that some uses of *Molech* in the Old Testament may have originally been used to refer to the live sacrificial offerings like Punic *mulk*. e.g., Mosca, P.G., op. cited, for summary see conclusions of chapter two and three.

20. Some scholars unconvincingly suggest that the "passing through to Molech" was a ritual "passing through" without active sacrifice. e.g., Snaith, N.H., "The Cult of Molech," *Vetus Testamentum*, 1966, vol. 16, pp. 123, 124. For the best refutation of this view see Mosca, P.G., op. cited, esp. p. 152; also see the Jeremiah passages quoted in this paper.

21. Smith, W.R., *Lectures on the Religion of the Semites*, 1901, p. 377. Note the reference to the fire pit of Topheth in Isaiah 30:33.

22. Wenham, G.J., op. cit., p. 249.

23. Kline, M.G., *The Treaty of the Great King*, 1963, pp. 79-83.

24. Wenham, G.J., op. cit., pp. 285, 286.

25. Whybray, R.N., *Isaiah 40-66: New Century Bible*, 1975, p. 202.

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27. Kaiser, W.C., Jr., *Toward Old Testament Ethics*, 1983, p. 124.

28. Schlossberg, H., *Idols for Destruction*, 1983, p. 6.

29. Romans 1:23 and 1:25b mutually inform each other as indicated by the identical Greek verb translated "exchange" and parallel sentence structure.

30. Tertullian, *Apologeticus IX*. - 6,8.

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32. Rankin, J.C., *Contrabortion*, June 1984, pg. 1.

33. Schmidt, S.M., "Wrongful Life," *Journal of the American Medical Association*, Oct. 28, 1983, Vol. 250, pp. 2209-10.

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Note: Scripture quotes are the New International Version.

Acknowledgements

Credit is due to Gary Pratico, Ph.D., for his assistance in directing me to extrabiblical literary sources and archeologic data regarding child sacrifice.

Credit is due to Gordon Hugenberger, Ph.D., candidate, and Hilton Terrell, M.D., for grammatical and stylistic help.