

Canaanite Child Sacrifice, Abortion, and the Bible

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INTRODUCTION

History is replete with civilizations that have held morally repugnant attitudes concerning infants and children. The Nazis carried Jewish children off to killing fields and the gas chambers at Auschwitz. The Aztecs and Mayans sacrificed both children and adults to their gods. Exposing an unwanted child to the elements or wild animals was a common practice throughout the Greco-Roman world. The Carthaginians of North Africa sacrificed their infants and children to pagan gods over a period of several centuries.

Old Testament passages referring to child sacrifice are both numerous and dreadful. The Israelites, delivered from the bondage of Egypt by the mighty hand of Yahweh, the Lord of heaven and earth, did not simply engage in idolatry. They were guilty of adopting the ghastly Canaanite practice of child sacrifice. In some cases, they attempted to attach this practice to worship of the Lord (Ezek 23:39). In others, they rejected Yahweh worship altogether and fully turned themselves over to the idols of Canaan (2 Kgs 17:14-17). Kings Ahaz and Manasseh, the “shepherds of Israel,” even burned their own sons in the fires of sacrifice (2 Chr 28:2-3; 33:6). Certain Israelites stood by and did nothing (Lev 20:4-5). Despite manifold warnings and admonitions from the Lord (Deut 12:29-31; 18:10), the Israelites persisted. As a result, God brought dreadful judgment upon their entire nation (Jer 19:3b-6).

The present author has several purposes in mind in writing this article. First, this article will attempt to connect the practice of child sacrifice at ancient Carthage to the Canaanite mainland, both culturally and geographically (near and in Israel proper).

This will be done through archaeological evidence and the testimonies of ancient authors. This evidence offers apologetic support for the veracity of the biblical references, which will also be discussed. Second, this paper will discuss recent scholarly attempts to deny that child sacrifice took place at Carthage, a position that the author believes is without warrant. Third, this article will survey the unnerving parallels between child sacrifice and modern-day abortion. Lastly, this article will touch upon several biblical and non-canonical texts that speak to the moral status of the unborn child.

Child Sacrifice at Carthage

The ancient city of Carthage, North Africa (modern Tunisia), began as a fledgling Phoenician colony and grew into one of the most prosperous and prominent city-states of the ancient world. Its influence and role in central Mediterranean history is often obscured by the legacy of the Greeks and the Romans. Known for resisting the Romans during the Punic Wars, the city's infamous military commander Hannibal was a nemesis of Rome for several decades. Most notably, Carthage has the ignominious reputation for performing large scale-child sacrifice over a period of several centuries.¹

Carthage was settled by the Phoenicians in the latter part of the ninth century BC.² Their place of origin was the Lebanese coast of Phoenicia, which was predominantly Canaanite during

¹ Lawrence Stager and Samuel Wolff, "Child Sacrifice at Carthage: Religious Rite or Population Control?" *BAR* 10, no. 1 (January-February 1984): 31-51; P.G. Mosca, "Child Sacrifice in Canaanite and Israelite Religion: A Study in Mulk and MLK" (Ph.D. diss., Harvard University, 1975).

² Chronological details on the founding of Carthage can be found in Rodger C. Young and Andrew E. Steinmann, "Correlation of Select Classical Sources Related to the Trojan War with Assyrian and Biblical Chronologies," *Journal for the Evangelical Study of the Old Testament* 1, no. 2 (2012): 227-8, 16n, <jesot.org/issues/1-2-2012> (access 28 July 2013).

the second millennium BC.³ Near the beginning of the Iron Age (ca. 1200 BC), the Phoenicians had taken control of the region.⁴ Scholars call the Lebanese coast Phoenicia, the name given to the region by the Greeks from their word for "purple." The ancient world's purple dye industry developed from extracting a fluid from a Mediterranean mollusk, the murex. The Phoenicians developed this industry and specialized in shipping this very valuable commodity all over the Mediterranean world. There are many connections between Israel in the OT and the Phoenician territories, notably, the cities of Tyre and Sidon.⁵

Like any nation or people group inhabiting a new territory, the Phoenicians brought their Canaanite ancestral beliefs and practices along with them when they settled at Carthage. Several lines of evidence demonstrate that one of these distinctive practices was child sacrifice. Numerous biblical texts refer to this horrific Canaanite practice taking place in Canaan as early as the fifteenth century BC. One of the earliest references is found in Deuteronomy 12:31:

You shall not worship the Lord your God in that way, for every abominable thing that the Lord hates they [the Canaanites] have done for their gods, for they even burn their sons and their daughters in the fire to their gods.

Several centuries later, despite persistent warnings, God judged his people for sacrificing their own children to the gods of Canaan in the Hinnom Valley, located on the south side of Jerusalem (Jer 7:30-32).

The open air sanctuary where child sacrifice took place was known as the *tophet* (תֹּפֶת), which is typically understood to

³ Gary Byers, "The Biblical Cities of Tyre and Sidon," *Bible and Spade* 15, no. 4 (Fall 2002): 107-8.

⁴ Stager and Wolff, "Child Sacrifice," 36.

⁵ For more on these connections, see Byers, "Biblical Cities," 107-10.

mean “roaster” or “place of burning.”⁶ Modern scholars have given the name *tophet* to places where they believe child sacrifice took place around the Mediterranean rim, mostly famously, at Carthage.⁷ The evidence indicates that the Phoenicians brought this barbaric practice to Carthage from Canaan, and therefore, evidence of child sacrifice at Carthage provides evidential support for the historicity of the biblical accounts which mention such sacrifices. Even though Carthage is geographically removed from Canaan (1400 miles or so), it is not religiously or culturally removed.

The Critics

In the past thirty years or so, several scholars have attempted to discredit or diminish the historicity and extent of the practice of child sacrifice at Carthage. In an attempt to restore the historical reputation and heritage of his country, Tunisian scholar M'hamed Hassine Fantar has vociferously argued that charges of Carthaginian child sacrifice are “propaganda.” Because Carthage was definitively defeated and destroyed by the Romans in 146 BC, Fantar contends that the Romans distorted history “to show us as barbarians . . . to justify their own barbarity.” Roman historians he considers to be more

⁶ Found in 2 Kings 23:10, Jeremiah 7:31-32; 19:6, 11-14. An alternative form, *tophet*, (תֹּפֶת) is used in Isaiah 30:33 in a judgment oracle against the Assyrians. Several scholars believe the vowels of the Masoretic Text deliberately imitate the pejorative Hebrew term for shame (תָּשָׁבַח), or spit (תִּפְתָּח) from Job 17:6. For more on this, see: J. Andrew Dearman, “The Tophet in Jerusalem: Archaeology and Cultural Profile,” *JNSL* 22, no. 1 (1996): 60, 4n. Overall, there is uncertainty amongst scholars about its ultimate etymology.

⁷ *Tophets* have also been discovered at Pozo Moro in Spain, Hadrumentum in North Africa, on the small island of Motya off Sicily, and at Nora, Sulcis, and Tharros on Sardinia (Shelby Brown, *Late Carthaginian Child Sacrifice and Sacrificial Monuments in Their Mediterranean Context*, *JSTOR/ASOR Monograph Series* 3 [Sheffield, England: Academic P, 1991]).

credible, such as Polybius and Livy, do not mention these practices at Carthage. This argument from silence demonstrates, in Fantar's estimation, that child sacrifice did not occur there. Fantar has also argued that the extensive child burials unearthed at Carthage occurred because of notoriously high infant mortality rates in antiquity.⁸ Italian scholar Sergio Ribichini supported Fantar's argument, claiming that the *tophet* at Carthage was "a child necropolis designed to receive the remains of infants who had died prematurely of sickness or other natural causes, and who for this reason were 'offered' to specific deities and buried in a place different from the one reserved for the ordinary dead."⁹

Thus, after finding this kind of support from other scholars, Fantar concludes,

Carthaginians did not sacrifice their children to Ba' al Hammon in the Tophet. This open air site . . . was a sanctuary presided over by Ba' al Hammon and his consort, Tanit To this sanctuary came grieving parents, who gave their children back to Ba' al Hammon and Tanit.¹⁰

University of Pittsburgh physical anthropologist Jeffrey Schwartz has recently quasi-joined Fantar's camp, casting further doubt on the notion that child sacrifice took place at Carthage. Schwartz diminishes the extent and volume of sacrifices that took place there, rather than denying their

⁸ Fantar's position is further expressed in an online interview: Andrew Higgins, "Carthage Tries To Live Down Image as Site of Infanticide," *Pittsburgh Post Gazette*, <<http://www.post-gazette.com/stories/news/world/carthage-tries-to-live-down-image-as-site-of-infanticide-584235/>> (accessed 14 February 2013).

⁹ Sergio Ribichini, "Beliefs and Religious Life" in *The Phoenicians*, ed. Sabatino Moscati (New York: I. B. Tauris, 1988), 141. According to Fantar, Moscati is the scholar who first caused him to doubt that child sacrifice had taken place at Carthage.

¹⁰ M'hamed Fantar, "Were Living Children Sacrificed to the Gods?" *Archaeology Odyssey* (November-December 2000): 30.

historicity fully.¹¹ His primary arguments are not oriented around defending Tunisian history and impugning alleged Roman historical revisionism. Rather, they are based on his interpretation of the anthropological evidence uncovered at Carthage.

Schwartz published reports that contend that large-scale child sacrifice did not take place at Carthage and that the cemetery discovered there is primarily filled with infants who died of natural causes. In his 2010 report, Schwartz's team claimed that its scientific examination of the remains of 348 cremated babies found in urns from the *tophet* at Carthage indicated "that most infants perished prenatally or very shortly after birth and were unlikely to have lived long enough to be sacrificed."¹² Further, based upon the tooth remains of 50 cremated children, Schwartz and his team concluded, "26 individuals died prenatally or within two weeks of birth."¹³ The remaining 24 were older infants. Schwartz continues,

Our study emphasizes that historical scientists must consider all evidence when deciphering ancient societal behavior. The idea of

¹¹ "An alternative hypothesis acknowledges that while the Carthaginians may have occasionally sacrificed humans, as did their contemporaries, the extreme youth of Tophet individuals suggests these cemeteries were not only for the sacrificed, but also for the very young, however they died." Here, Schwartz is admitting that child sacrifice did take place at Carthage, at least in part. Schwartz's full technical report is available online: Jeffrey H. Schwartz, Frank Houghton, Roberto Macchiarelli, and Luca Bondioli, "Skeletal Remains from Punic Carthage Do Not Support Systematic Sacrifice of Infants," *PLOS One*, <<http://www.plosone.org/article/info%3Adoi%2F10.1371%2Fjournal.pone.0009177>> (accessed 14 February 2013).

¹² "Pitt-led Study Debunks Millennia-old Claims of Systematic Infant Sacrifice in Ancient Carthage," *EurekaAlert* 17 February 2010, <http://www.eurekaalert.org/pub_releases/2010-02/uop-psd021710.php> (accessed 14 February 2013).

¹³ *Ibid.*

regular infant sacrifice in Carthage is not based on a study of the cremated remains, but on instances of human sacrifice reported by a few ancient chroniclers, inferred from ambiguous Carthaginian inscriptions, and referenced in the Old Testament. Our results show that some children were sacrificed, but they contradict the conclusion that Carthaginians were a brutal bunch who regularly sacrificed their own children.¹⁴

Additionally, Schwartz has stated, “Very young Punic [Phoenician] children were cremated and interred in burial urns regardless of how they died.”¹⁵ He also claimed that his team disproved the commonly held theory that only first-born males were sacrificed. His team's study of pelvic bones from the burial urns from the Carthage tophet proved that “38 pelvises came from females and 26 from males.”¹⁶ In a September 2012 interview, Schwartz again reiterated his position: “It's all very great, cinematic stuff, but whether that was a constant daily activity—I think our analysis contradicts that.”¹⁷

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Ibid. “Punic” is the term the Romans used for the Phoenicians. It should be noted Schwartz cannot attribute the *cause* of death based on the skeletal remains alone.

¹⁶ Ibid. Billington responds to the first-born male assertion by Schwartz: “. . . it has long been known that the infants found in the tophet at Carthage were both male and female, and thus Schwartz's team does not provide any truly new information on this subject. However, the fact that Schwartz's study identified 38 females and only 26 males in 70 studied urns from the Carthage tophet may be significant. It suggests that the Carthaginians may have practiced some sort of selection process. If so, it would disprove Schwartz's conclusion that most of these infants died natural deaths” (Clyde Billington, “Carthaginian Baby Burning Reportedly Debunked,” *Artifax* 25, no. 2 [Spring 2010]: 18).

¹⁷ Tia Ghose, “Ancient Baby Graveyard Not for Child Sacrifice, Scientists Say,” *Live Science*, <<http://www.livescience.com/23298-carthage-graveyard-not-child-sacrifice.html>> (accessed 14 February 2013).

The implications from this line of argumentation are somewhat obvious for biblical studies: if one can discredit the historicity of child sacrifice at Carthage and its ancestral connections to the same type of brutal practice in Canaan/Phoenicia, then one might argue that the portrayals of child sacrifice in the OT are fictitious or exaggerated.

RESPONSE TO FANTAR AND SCHWARTZ

There are a number of serious and insurmountable difficulties associated with Schwartz's and Fantar's arguments and analyses.

The Historical Sources

First, Fantar's zeal to redeem his country's reputation may be admirable, but it actually serves to undermine his case. Demeaning rhetoric concerning the motives of Roman and Greek historians without a shred of proof is not convincing, and then selectively appealing to other Roman historians who do not mention child sacrifice is problematic at best. One can easily see that this appeal is both inflammatory and an erroneous argument from silence. Schwartz falls into the same trap, stating, "Some of this [the historical records] might have been anti-Carthaginian propaganda."¹⁸ The historical record contains multiple sources from varied cultural backgrounds and time

¹⁸ Ibid. Enemies have used atrocities as propaganda against each other throughout world history. Consider the Soviet execution of over 4000 Polish officers in the Katyn Forest during WWII. The Nazis used this grisly discovery against the Soviets as propaganda. The Nazi accusations actually turned out to be true, while the Nazis themselves were guilty of even greater atrocities. It is entirely plausible that the Romans, who were guilty of their own barbarities, were actually reporting the truth about Carthaginian child sacrifice. Propaganda is not always necessarily false.

periods that testify to the realities of Carthaginian child sacrifice. These include: (1) Late fourth century BC Greek author Kleitarchos;¹⁹ (2) first-century BC Greek historian Diodorus Siculus;²⁰ (3) second-century AD Greek author Plutarch;²¹ (4)

¹⁹ “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. There stands in their midst a bronze statue of Kronos, its hands extended over a bronze brazier, the flames of which engulf the child” (translated by P. G. Mosca, 22).

²⁰ “They also alleged that Cronus had turned against them inasmuch as in former times they 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; and when an investigation was made, some of those who had been sacrificed were discovered to have been supposititious. When they had given thought to these things and saw their enemy encamped before their walls, they were filled with superstitious dread, for they believed that they had neglected the honours of the gods that had been established by their fathers. In their zeal to make amends for their omission, they selected two hundred of the noblest children and sacrificed them publicly; and others who were under suspicion sacrificed themselves voluntarily, in number not less than three hundred. 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” (Diodorus Siculus, *The Library of History*, Book 20, 14:4-7, Loeb Classical Library, 1954, 153).

²¹ “No, but with full knowledge and understanding they themselves offered up their own children, and those who had no children would buy little ones from poor people and cut their throats as if they were so many lambs or young birds; meanwhile the mother stood by without a tear or moan; but should she utter a single moan or let fall a single tear, she had to forfeit the money, and her child was sacrificed nevertheless; and 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” (Plutarch, *On Superstition*, Loeb Classical Library, 1928, 2:495).

church father, Tertullian of Carthage (AD 160-225);²² (5) church father, Eusebius of Caesarea (AD 263-339).²³

These various historians, from different eras and cultures all reported that the Carthaginians sacrificed their children to their gods. Are we to believe that they all invented these horrific fictions to impugn the reputation of the Carthaginian people?²⁴ The charge seems rather incredible on the face of it.

²² "In Africa, infants used to be sacrificed to Saturn [the Latinized equivalent of Ba'al Hammon], and quite openly, down to the proconsulate of Tiberias, who took the priests themselves and on the very trees of their temple, under whose shadow their crimes had been committed, hung them alive like votive offerings on crosses; and the soldiers of my own country are witnesses to it, who served that proconsul in that very task. Yes, and to this day that holy crime persists in secret. . ." (Tertullian, *Apologeticus*, 9:1-3).

²³ Eusebius refers to a list of historical sources, with which the contemporary reader was presumably aware, to point out the errors of paganism, which often endorsed the practice of both adult and child sacrifice. Quoting Philo Biblius, he writes: "It was a custom of the ancients in the great crises of danger for the rulers of a city or nation, in order to avert the general destruction, to give up the most beloved of their children for sacrifice as a ransom to the avenging daemons: and those who were so given up were slain with mystic rites. Kronos, therefore, whom the Phoenicians call El, who was king of the country, and subsequently, after his decease, was deified and changed into the star Saturn, had by a nymph of the same country called Anobret an only-begotten son (whom on this account they called Jeiid, the only-begotten being still so called among the Phoenicians); and when extreme dangers from war had befallen the country, he arrayed his son in royal apparel, and prepared an altar and sacrificed him" (Eusebius, *Praeparatio Evangelica*, Trans. E. H. Gifford, Chapters 15-16, 1903).

²⁴ Clyde Billington makes this additional suggestion: "As you note, the Greeks and Romans frequently exposed unwanted children, i.e., put them outside the wall of the city to die. This was a regular practice at Sparta where each child was inspected by the state, and if defective, exposed. What the Greeks and Romans saw as strange was not that the Phoenicians/Canaanites killed babies, but rather that they sacrificed them in religious rituals to deities. In other words, Greek and Roman criticism of the Carthaginians was not moral--i.e., the

Archaeological and Biblical Data

Funerary stelae. Harvard archaeologist Lawrence E. Stager has refuted Fantar's (and now Schwartz's) position primarily as a result of his excavation work conducted at Carthage in the 1970s under the auspices of the University of Chicago's Oriental Institute.²⁵ His most widely circulated work is the article which he co-authored with Samuel R. Wolff, "Child Sacrifice at Carthage: Religious Rite or Population Control?"²⁶

The engravings found on the funerary stelae at Carthage are devastating to the skeptical position. Under the stelae are urns containing the burnt remains of the children. It is estimated that there are tens of thousands of them. Inscribed on many of the stelae is a certain Semitic inscription, *mlk*, which may have a very close connection to the OT. Hebrew, like other Semitic languages, was originally written without vowels.²⁷ Based on epigraphical studies by Paul Mosca,²⁸ these Semitic inscriptions

murder of babies--but theological, i.e., that the crazy Carthaginians believed that the gods wanted such sacrifices" (email message to author, 26 February 2013).

²⁵ Stager (along with Joseph Greene) and Fantar engaged in a debate ("Were Living Children Sacrificed to the Gods?" *Archaeology Odyssey* [November-December 2000]: 28-31). Their opposing viewpoints are spelled out in an online forum: Phoenicia.org, "Child Sacrifice: Children of Phoenician Punic Carthage Were Not Sacrificed to the Gods," <<http://phoenicia.org/childsacrifice.html>> (accessed 14 February 2013).

²⁶ Stager and Wolff also cite other scholars who hold the general view of Fantar and Schwartz ("Child Sacrifice," 38).

²⁷ Vowel points were added by the Masoretes in the seventh to tenth centuries AD, and are not part of the original, God-breathed text of the OT.

²⁸ Mosca, "Mulk and MLK," 1975.

have been translated as *mulk*. Stager explains the meaning: “*Mulk* is a technical word in Semitic for a *live sacrifice* fulfillment of a Tophet vow, just as other Semitic words are used to indicate cereal offerings and other kinds of animal sacrifices.”²⁹ The Semitic inscription *mlk* is compelling evidence that the children were still alive when they were brought to the sacrificial ritual, verified by the historical sources previously cited.³⁰

These inscriptions reveal a glaring logical inconsistency in Fantar's and Schwartz's arguments. A child who had already died due to natural causes would hardly be a “sacrifice” when being brought to the fires. This amounts to nothing more than a cremation ceremony, hardly an adequate sacrifice to be given in exchange for a vow. Since the child was already deceased, the parents could manipulate the god to grant them favor, giving nothing but a dead body in return. Anyone who has prayed to a “god” should immediately recognize such a formulation as absurd. This inscription from Carthage serves our point: “To our lady, to Tanit, the face of Ba’al, and to our lord, to Ba’al Hammon,

²⁹ Stager and Wolff, “Child Sacrifice,” 45 (emphasis added).

³⁰ It is not fully clear whether the children were first killed on the altar, and then burned, or if they actually perished in the fire itself. Billington suggests, “Bodies that are burned with blood still in them will produce a black char on the burned bones. There is no black char found on any of the bones of these children,” (Clyde Billington, “Scientist Says Tophets Were Not For Sacrificed Babies,” *Artifax* 27, no. 4 [Autumn 2012]: 14). De Vaux argues that slaughter preceding the cremation “has been well established by J. Guey in *Melanges D’archeologic et D’histoire*, 1937, pp. 94-99” (Roland de Vaux, *Studies in Old Testament Sacrifices* [London: Univ. of Wales, 1964], 81). Ezekiel 16:20-21 may indicate that the children were first killed, *then* put in the fire: “And you took your sons and your daughters, whom you had borne to me, and these you sacrificed to them to be devoured. Were your whorings so small a matter that *you slaughtered my children and delivered them up as an offering by fire to them?*” (emphasis added). The *slaughtering* and *delivering up* could be acts that occur in succession, since the verbs are connected with a *waw* consecutive. Verse 21 reads: וְתִשְׁחָטֵי אֶת־בְּנֵי וְתִתְּנֵי בְּהַעֲבִיר אוֹתָם

that which was vowed. . . because he [the deity] heard his voice and blessed him.”³¹

Hundreds of these funerary stelae at Carthage are inscribed with the images of the goddess Tanit, and her consort, Ba'al Hammon. Tanit is represented on many of the Carthaginian stelae with an upraised hand(s) or triangles with extended lines and circles that represent upraised hands. Ba'al Hammon is typically represented by a disk and crescent.³² Some stelae are inscribed with both vows and the iconography of Tanit and Ba'al Hammon. We shall return to the significance of these inscriptions in a moment.

Molech. Molech (מֹלֶךְ) appears in a number of places in the OT, mostly in connection with child sacrifice (Lev 18:21; 20:2-4). There is a strong argument to be made that Jephthah's infamous vow and subsequent sacrifice of his daughter was influenced by the cult of Molech (Judg 11:29-40).³³ Solomon became ensnared by foreign gods, erecting high places in honor of both Chemosh and Molech (1 Kgs 11:7). Stager and Wolff suggest the possibility that Molech, also mentioned in Jeremiah 32:35 and 2 Kings 23:10, may be better translated as *mulk*. The same Hebrew consonants (מֹלֶךְ) that appear in the biblical texts commonly translated as “Molech” are the same Semitic consonants found on the funerary stelae at Carthage, *mlk*.³⁴

³¹ Stager and Wolff, “Child Sacrifice,” 46.

³² Ibid.

³³ John Roskoski, “Jephthah's Vow: A Corruption of Yahwism in the Era of the Judges,” *Bible and Spade* 25, no. 1 (Winter 2012): 23-28.

³⁴ The Hebrew word for king, *melech* (מֶלֶךְ), is spelled with the same consonants, מֹלֶךְ. A number of commentators believe that *molech* is a deliberate pejorative whereby the vowel pointing for the Hebrew word *shame* (בֹּשָׁת) is placed on the consonants in the same manner as *tophet*. See also footnote #6. For further analysis, sources and discussion concerning the meaning and translation of מֹלֶךְ, see

Along the same lines, John Roskoski suggests the relationship between the deity Molech and the sacrificial term *mlk* are the result of metonymy:

Metonymy is a figure of speech in which a name, or noun, is used instead of another. It is a figure of relationship. Therefore, the name of a person, or deity, can be placed by metonymy for something which stands in special relation to them. The name “Molech” had a special connection to human, particularly child, sacrifice. This would lead to the conclusion that “molech” was originally the name of the horrific deity and, later, was made to mean, or substitute for, the actual sacrifice. Essentially, Molech gave his name to the ritual sacrifice.³⁵

Recall that this *mlk* sacrifice at Carthage refers to a living sacrifice of either a child, or animal substitute. And interestingly, the presence of animal remains at Carthage, which appear to have occasionally substituted for children, is consistent with the assertion that the tophet at Carthage was not a regular cemetery, but a sanctuary for ritual sacrifice and interment, contra the claims of Fantar and Schwartz. Billington concludes,

. . . a small minority of urns in the Carthage tophet contains the bones of cremated sheep. These were unquestionably animals offered as religious sacrifices. The very presence of these sacrificed animals very strongly suggests that the tophet at Carthage was only used as a burial site for victims of religious sacrifices.³⁶

Dearman, 60, 5n; 69-71. Interestingly, the LXX translated מלך as Μολοχ in some places (Jer. 32:35) and as “king” βασιλευς (1 Kgs 11:7) in others. Μολοχ appears only once in the NT, mentioned by Stephen in Acts 7:43.

³⁵ Roskoski, “Jephthah’s Vow,” 27.

³⁶ Billington, “Carthaginian Baby Burning Reportedly Debunked,” 18.

Ba'al. Ba'al (בעל) appears throughout the OT with a variety of meanings and in various contexts. Most broadly speaking, it can mean "lord" or "master." However, its primary identification is with Semitic/Canaanite deities, typically thought to be in control of certain localities or regions. For example, the Ba'al of Tyre was Melkart (son of El), the Ba'al of Carthage was Ba'al Hammon, and the Ba'al of the Philistine city of Ekron was Ba'alzebub ("Lord of the Flies").³⁷ OT references to the plural *Ba'alim* likely refer to these Canaanite deities in general (cf. Jdg. 10:6).³⁸

To connect the dots a little more definitively, the prophet Jeremiah closely interrelated the high places of *Ba'al*, the term *Molech*, and child sacrifice: "They built the high places of Ba'al in the Valley of the Son of Hinnom, to offer up their sons and daughters to Molech. . . (Jer 32:35)."³⁹

The remains of thousands of incinerated children were buried at Carthage under the aforementioned funerary stelae with Semitic inscriptions that refer to living sacrifices, *mlk*. In Jeremiah 32:35⁴⁰ child sacrifice is directly associated with *Ba'al*

³⁷ J. D. Douglas and Merrill Tenney, *Zondervan Illustrated Bible Dictionary*, ed. Moises Silva (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2011), 149-52. For a brief survey and additional references pertaining to the Canaanite religious pantheon, see Eugene H. Merrill, *Kingdom of Priests* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2008), 178-80.

³⁸ Merrill, *Kingdom of Priests*, 180.

³⁹ Child sacrifice is not explicitly connected to Ba'al in every context mentioned in the OT. There is not "one fixed formula" in the OT describing child sacrifice. Rather, it is presented in a variety of ways and contexts (Dearman, "Tophet in Jerusalem," 62).

⁴⁰ Jeremiah 19:4 also connects Ba'al to child sacrifice: ". . . and because they have filled this place with the blood of innocents, and have built the high places of Baal to burn their sons in the fire as burnt offerings to Baal, which I did not command or decree, nor did it come into my mind."

worship and *Molech*, which can then be connected to the *mlk* inscriptions.

We should also examine the spiritual dimension of this practice, drawing on the broader teaching of Scripture. The Psalmist parallels demons and the idols of Canaan in the practice of child sacrifice, where the idols are most certainly a reference to the Canaanite *Ba'alim* (Ps 106:36-38), the “snares” which God repeatedly warned the Israelites about.⁴¹ This particular passage instructs us theologically, revealing that the ultimate prevaricators responsible for deceiving human beings into murdering their own children are demons.⁴² Satan is the ultimate inspiration of all the manifestations of the murderous *Ba'alim*, whether in Carthage, Jerusalem, or in modern-day abortion clinics.

Based on these insights, it is appropriate to connect the *Ba'alim* found in the OT and the Ba'al Hammon inscriptions found at Carthage. While we cannot be dogmatic, the totality of the overall biblical and archaeological evidence certainly lends merit to connecting them together.⁴³

Zarephath. In 1974, an ivory plaque measuring 2 x 1.3 inches was discovered at the excavations at the Phoenician city of Sarepta (biblical Zarephath).⁴⁴ This discovery, dated to the seventh century BC, was reported by Bryant Wood as follows:

⁴¹ Ezekiel 23:39 also connects idols to child sacrifice: “*For when they had slaughtered their children in sacrifice to their idols, on the same day they came into my sanctuary to profane it*” (emphasis added; cf. Ezra 20:31).

⁴² The term “demon”- דַּיִם is rarely used in the OT (cf. Deut. 32:17). The Apostle Paul warns the church, “. . . what pagans sacrifice they offer to demons and not to God. I do not want you to be participants with demons” (1 Cor 10:20).

⁴³ Dearman, “Tophet in Jerusalem,” 67, 14n.

⁴⁴ It is indeed ironic that evidence for an idol which inspires and encourages the sacrificial murder of children was discovered in the same city where Yahweh raised a young boy from the dead through the prophet Elijah (1 Kgs 17).

In the 1971 season a small shrine dating to the Iron Age (1200-600 B.C.) was discovered at Zarephath. This was the first homeland Phoenician shrine to be found. In 1974, excavations in the shrine produced an assortment of votive objects and cultic equipment, including figurines, carved ivory, beads, masks, amulets, cosmetic equipment and saucer lamps. Among the objects found in the shrine was an ivory plaque with an inscription on it. The plaque was probably originally fastened to a wooden statue.

The four-line inscription of the plaque, written in ancient Phoenician characters, reads "This statue made (by) Shillem, son of Mabaal, son of Inai for Tanit-Ashtart." This is the oldest reference to Tanit found to date and it identifies the shrine and cultic objects as dedicated to Tanit and another Phoenician deity, Ashtart or Astarte, goddess of fertility. Astarte [Ashtoreth] is mentioned in the Bible at a number of places, e.g., Judges 10:6, 1 Kings 11:5, 33 and 2 Kings 23:13.⁴⁵

Additional artifacts with the sign of Tanit on seals, lead weights, and bullae have been made since the Sarepta discovery along the Phoenician coast at sites such as Acco, Tel Dor, and Ashdod Yam. The symbol of Tanit was also discovered on dozens of pottery figurines dated to the fifth century BC in a Carthaginian shipwreck at Shavei Zion, off the coast of Israel, north of Acco.⁴⁶ With these discoveries, definitive connections between Tanit at Carthage and Tanit-Ashtart in the Phoenician homeland were verified in the archaeological record.

⁴⁵ Bryant G. Wood, "Evidence of Child Sacrifice Found At Zarephath," *Bible and Spade* 4, no. 1 (Winter 1975): 23. For further information on this discovery, see James B. Pritchard, *Recovering Sarepta, A Phoenician City* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1978).

⁴⁶ Epraim Stern, "Goddesses and Cults at Tel Dor," in *Confronting the Past: Archaeological and Historical Essays on Ancient Israel in Honor of William G. Dever*, ed. Seymour Gitin (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbraun's, 2006), 177-8.

Ashkelon. Located on the southern coast of Canaan, the city of Ashkelon has had a significant 4000+ year history. The Canaanites built an enormous fortification system there in the Middle Bronze period (2000-1550 BC).⁴⁷ A Philistine stronghold during most of the Iron Age (1200-587 BC), it was destroyed by Nebuchadnezzar around 604 BC. Eventually, the Persians (538-332 BC) ruled Ashkelon, delegating the task of administration to the cooperative Phoenicians.⁴⁸ During this period, Phoenician culture was pervasive in Ashkelon. Archaeological excavations have revealed Phoenician pottery, inscriptions, and symbols of Tanit, all dated to the fifth century BC.⁴⁹ The Tanit cult continued to persist for many centuries in Ashkelon, as her symbols even appear on coins down into the Greco-Roman period. Stager reports,

Tanit appears together with Roman emperors and empresses on second and third century A.D. coins minted in Ashkelon. . . . She is identified in Greek as *Phanēbalos*; this is a transparent Greek transcription of *pāne Ba'al*, or "Face of Ba'al," a favorite epithet in the Phoenician and Punic languages for Tanit, known from hundreds of inscriptions found at Phoenician Carthage.⁵⁰

⁴⁷ Lawrence A. Stager, "When Canaanites and Philistines Ruled Ashkelon," *BAR* 17, no. 2 (March-April 1991): 26.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*

⁴⁹ Lawrence A. Stager, "Why Were Hundreds of Dogs Buried at Ashkelon?" *BAR* 17, no. 3 (May-June 1991): 28, 37.

⁵⁰ Lawrence A. Stager, "Eroticism and Infanticide at Ashkelon," *BAR* 17, no. 4 (July-August 1991): 42. Evidence for wide-scale infanticide was found in an Ashkelon sewer. Patricia Smith and Gila Kahila report on this grisly discovery: "Excavation of the Roman-Byzantine sewer system associated with the bathhouse at Ashkelon revealed the skeletons of nearly 100 infants. . . . While it is conceivable that the infants found in the drain were stillborn, their number, age and condition strongly suggest that they were killed and thrown into the drain immediately after birth," (qtd. in Stager, "Eroticism and Infanticide," 47, sidebar).

Given these various discoveries, there should no longer be any doubt about the connection between Tanit at Carthage and Tanit-Ashtart in the Canaanite mainland. Similar to the inscriptions at Carthage, the author of Judges put the names of *Ashtarte* and *Ba'al* together long before that city was even established: "The people of Israel again did what was evil in the sight of the LORD and served the *Baals* and the *Ashtoreth*. . . . And they forsook the LORD and did not serve him" (Judg 10:6; cf. 2:13).⁵¹

Hazor. The city of Hazor was one of the most significant and important cities in Canaan. Besides Jerusalem, it is the largest archaeological site in Israel. It is massive in size, exceeding 200 acres, which explains why Joshua 11:10 refers to it as "the head of all these kingdoms" (cf. Josh 11:1-5, 10-13; Judg 4:2). Located in Israel proper, archaeologist Yigael Yadin discovered several stelae from Late Bronze I (ca. 1425-1400 BC) during his excavations at Hazor in the 1950's. One of the stelae revealed a relief with two upraised hands, with a disk and crescent at the top, predating the Carthaginian versions by several centuries. Yadin believed that the hands, disk and crescent represent the same gods, concluding, "It is quite clear that the Punic culture preserved elements of the Phoenician culture, and the latter was definitively influenced by Canaanite elements, similar to the ones uncovered at Hazor."⁵² This archaeological evidence from

⁵¹ Second Kings 23:13 refers to "Ashtoreth, the abomination of the Sidonians." Sidon is located about 25 miles north of Tyre in the Phoenician mainland. It should be noted that, similar to *Tophet* and *Molech*, a number of scholars also believe *Ashtoreth* is also deliberately pointed with the vowels of *shame*) (אִשְׁתֹּרֶת).

This might account for the slight variation in spelling between the OT references and the extra-biblical sources (John Day, *Yahweh and the Gods and Goddesses of Canaan* [New York: Sheffield Academic, 2002], 128-30).

⁵² Yigael Yadin, "Symbols of Deities at Zingirli, Carthage and Hazor," in *Near Eastern Archaeology in the Twentieth Century: Essays in*

the Canaanite city of Hazor provides more powerful evidence connecting the Carthaginian/Phoenician deities to Canaan/Israel, and the Bible.

Tyre. The American University of Beirut published a study in 1991 analyzing artifacts and remains discovered in Tyre that may point to child sacrifice. Of interest are two cinerary urns whose closest parallel, according to the authors, were found in the Carthaginian *tophet*, dated to the eighth century BC. Several of the urns contained human bone fragments, many of which appear to have been incinerated at high temperatures, although the evidence is extremely fragmentary. Multiple stelae have been discovered and examined as well. While scholars ought to be cautious since this material was accidentally discovered there during a construction project, further research may provide more definitive evidence placing an actual *tophet* in the prominent and important biblical city of Tyre, right in the Canaanite/Phoenician homeland.⁵³

The possibility of a Tyrian *tophet* is intimated by Roman historian Quintus Curtius Rufus. In his *History of Alexander the Great*, he documents Alexander's infamous siege of Tyre in 332 BC. Rufus reports that during the siege, the elders of Tyre seriously contemplated reinstating the sacrifice of children to their gods in order to avert the disaster which was falling upon them. Although they eventually abstained, the testimony of Rufus discloses another historical connection to child sacrifice in the Canaanite mainland.⁵⁴

The Anthropological Data

Honor of Nelson Glueck, ed. James A. Sanders (Garden-City, NY: Doubleday, 1970), 199-231.

⁵³ Helga Seeden, "A Tophet in Tyre?" *Berytus* 34, (1991): 39-82, <<http://almashriq.hiof.no/ddc/projects/archaeology/berytus-back/berytus39/seeden-tophet/>> (accessed 14 February 2013).

⁵⁴ Quintus Curtius Rufus, *History of Alexander*, 4.3.23.

Stager and a team of other scholars have recently published their own analysis of the cremated remains from the burial urns at Carthage. Their in-depth study indicates most of the infants died during a very limited lifespan range, 1-1.50 months, dispelling the argument that the *tophet* at Carthage was just a regular cemetery, filled with thousands of children who died of natural causes. They state,

The argument for infant sacrifice depends largely on a skewed age profile, and age is not easy to determine. The authors approach this [age determination] problem with a battery of new techniques, showing that in the Tophet of Carthage the majority of the infants died between one and one and a half months.... The age profile of the Tophet infants is markedly different from that expected in the case of death from natural causes.⁵⁵

Stager et al., also note an important methodological error in Schwartz's analysis, which depended on less reliable bone remains rather than infant dental remains:

Our findings for the Carthage Tophet are similar to those reached by previous studies carried out primarily on the dentition [dental remains] (Gejvall 1949; Richard 1961). The one divergent opinion is that of Schwartz *et al.* (2010) who examined many of the same Carthage Tophet infants described in this study, but *used cranial bones for age estimations*. This may have caused them to err by underestimating the extent of the shrinkage [due to intense heat from the fire], *especially in the youngest individuals with the most fragile bones, since they are less reliable for age estimation than teeth*.⁵⁶

There is always a degree of uncertainty involving such scientific studies, especially since the human remains were

⁵⁵ P. Smith, G. Avishai, J. A. Greene and L. E. Stager, "Aging Cremated Infants: The Problem of Sacrifice at the Tophet of Carthage," *Antiquity* 85, no. 329 (September 2011): 859, 871.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 868 (emphasis added).

subjected to intense heat and are thousands of years old. Nonetheless, when scholars consider the totality of all the evidence, the sacrificial interpretation of the anthropological remains at Carthage has a far greater likelihood of being correct. Contemplating this anthropological data, the archaeological evidence, the testimony of ancient authors, and the biblical texts, one can confidently conclude that child sacrifice not only took place at Carthage, but in Canaan and in Israel as well.

PARALLELS BETWEEN CHILD SACRIFICE AND MODERN ABORTION

A number of eerie parallels exist between the ancient practice of child sacrifice and modern-day abortion. The discussion here will be brief.⁵⁷

Crisis or convenience. 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. These individual crises are exemplified by a corporate crisis at ancient Carthage. Siculus reported that the Carthaginians tried to avert a calamity from a foreign enemy by publicly sacrificing several hundred children. The emergency did not abate, and it was subsequently discovered that a number of wealthy Carthaginians had purchased children from poor people and sacrificed them instead of their own. In effect, they were attempting to "fool" the gods. Since the crisis was not averted, they panicked and subsequently sacrificed two hundred of their *own* children, while approximately three hundred adults sacrificed themselves as well.⁵⁸

⁵⁷ For further parallels and more in-depth discussion, see Andrew White, "Abortion and the Ancient Practice of Child Sacrifice," Associates for Biblical Research, <<http://www.biblearchaeology.org/post/2012/01/05/Abortion-and-the-Ancient-Practice-of-Child-Sacrifice.aspx>> (accessed 20 February 20, 2013).

⁵⁸ Diodorus Siculus, *The Library of History*, Book 20, 14:4-7, Loeb Classical Library, 1954, 153. See footnote #20 for the full quotation.

Like contemporary rationales for abortion, socio-economic concerns also played a role in the decision to sacrifice a child at Carthage.⁵⁹ Today, abortion often occurs because the pregnancy is unexpected, and a plethora of fears about the future often govern the decision to terminate the child. Even worse, some people simply see the child as an intrusion into their self-serving lifestyle and an obstacle on their road to success. Instead of turning to the Creator for deliverance from a crisis pregnancy, modern people turn to their own autonomy and the self-worshipping ideology of modern society that has made abortion easily available to the common citizen.

Sexual promiscuity. Leviticus 20:1-5 prohibits child sacrifice and the immediate context also deals explicitly with sexual immorality (Lev 19:20, 29; 20:10-21), connecting the two closely together. The results of such illicit unions would inevitably bring about pregnancies, and the unwanted child could easily be disposed of through sacrificial rituals.

Cultic temple prostitution was an integral part of Canaanite religion and closely tied to child sacrifice. The Canaanites dramatized their mythologies through ritualized enactments:

The ritual . . . centered in sexual activity, since the rainfall attributed to Baal was thought to represent his semen dropping to earth to fertilize and impregnate the earth with life just as he impregnated Asherah, the goddess of fertility, in the myth. Canaanite religion was thus grossly sensual and even perverse because it required both the services of both male and female cultic prostitutes as the principal actors in the drama.⁶⁰

Similarly, Western culture is awash in fornication and adultery, and sexual promiscuity is exalted as both desirable and virtuous. The result has been millions of unplanned pregnancies outside the covenant of marriage. Over 80% of all

⁵⁹ Stager and Wolff, "Child Sacrifice," 50-51.

⁶⁰ Merrill, *Kingdom*, 180.

abortions in the U.S. are performed on unmarried women.⁶¹ Undoubtedly, rebellious Israelite men had encounters with prostitutes, and many of them ended up pregnant. Modern men often pressure women to have an abortion and abandon the women to bear the consequences of their deviant sexual practices.

Population control. According to Stager and Greene, the estimated population of Carthage at its peak was probably around 250,000. Agricultural capability in the era of Carthage seems to have been inadequate for a population of that size, and the evidence seems to indicate that the child sacrifice increased and reached its peak at the same time.⁶² Today, abortion is sanctioned all around the world, and 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.

Handicapped children. Evidence from Carthage shows parents would sometimes sacrifice a so-called “defective child” with the hope that they would later receive a healthy one as a substitute. In one chilling 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.”⁶³ Today, if doctors believe a child in-utero has medical problems, the parents are often advised to terminate the pregnancy, sometimes with an inordinate deal of pressure. To carry to term and raise a “defective” child is not

⁶¹ Center for Disease Control and Prevention, “Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report,” <http://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/preview/mmwrhtml/ss6108a1.htm?s_cid=ss6108a1_w> (accessed 14 February 2013).

⁶² Stager and Wolff, “Child Sacrifice,” 51.

⁶³ C. Kennedy, “Queries/Comments,” *BAR* 10, no. 3 (May-June 1984): 20, citing J. Fevrier, “Une Sacrifice d’Enfant les Numides,” *Annuaire de l’Institut de Philologie et d’Histoire Orientales et Slave* (Brunelles 13), 1953.

expected of the parents, since doing so would be considered "burdensome."⁶⁴

"Civilized" advancement. Lastly, Carthage was a thriving civilization, and at its height, the archaeological evidence indicates that child sacrifice reached its apex. The flourishing of abortion in modern and advanced America, like child sacrifice in ancient Carthage at the height of its prominence, is an unmistakable parallel.

Dr. John Currid, a participant in the excavations at Carthage, provides an appropriate summation:

It is interesting to note that of all the societies I have studied, primitive cultures have little evidence of abortion or infanticide; they are primarily the practices of the higher cultures of antiquity. It seems to me that the only enlightening difference between our societies and Carthage of old is that we have sanitized the process. We do not offer our children to some idol; we destroy them in a hospital, in a most orderly and hygienic fashion. Ours are sacrifices of convenience without any façade of religious motivation. *In truth, we are merely unmasked Carthaginians.*⁶⁵

THE BIBLE AND THE PRACTICE OF ABORTION

The Christian who takes seriously the authority, inerrancy, and infallibility of the Bible must reckon with the obvious teaching of Scripture concerning the beginning of human life and the value God places on human beings created in His image. Many professing Christians have taken the position that abortion is a private and personal matter, or that a fetus is not

⁶⁴ B. Vautier argues that non-personhood "has extended into the special care nursery . . . [with] involuntary euthanasia for disabled newborns. These physicians have publicly justified allowing death as a 'management option' when the 'hope of meaningful personhood is absent'. Fetal life has failed the personhood test . . . simply by default" (B. Vautier, "Definition of Death," *Dignity and Dying* [Grand Rapids: Paternoster, 1996], 99). Thanks to John Roskoski for this source and quotation.

⁶⁵ John Currid, "Abortion: Child Sacrifice Today?" *Bible and Spade* 25, no. 1 (Winter 2012): 13-15 (emphasis added).

human until it reaches some particular state of development, or Christians should not be focused on changing public policy with respect to abortion (after all, politics is a "dirty business"). When taken in its totality, the biblical testimony is clearly in opposition to these positions.

*Conception is a gift from God.*⁶⁶

The LORD visited Sarah as he had said, and the LORD did to Sarah as he had promised. And Sarah conceived and bore Abraham a son in his old age at the time of which God had spoken to him. (Gen 21:1-2)

And Isaac prayed to the LORD for his wife, because she was barren. And the LORD granted his prayer, and Rebekah his wife conceived. (Gen 25:21)

Then God remembered Rachel, and God listened to her and opened her womb. She conceived and bore a son and said, "God has taken away my reproach." (Gen 30:22-23)

...in due time Hannah conceived and bore a son, and she called his name Samuel, for she said, "I have asked for him from the LORD." (1 Sam 1:20)

But the angel said to him, "Do not be afraid, Zechariah, for your prayer has been heard, and your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son, and you shall call his name John. (Luke 1:13)⁶⁷

God is the Creator of the Unborn.

Your hands fashioned and made me... Remember that you have made me like clay... You clothed me with skin and flesh, and knit me together with bones and sinews. (Job 10: 8a, 9a, 11)

⁶⁶ Also, Genesis 5:3; 18:9-15; 29:31-35; Judges 13:2-3.

⁶⁷ Also, Luke 1:26-38 concerning the birth of the Lord Jesus himself.

Did not he who made me in the womb make him? And did not one fashion us in the womb? (Job 31:15)

For you formed my inward parts; you knitted me together in my mother's womb. I praise you, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made. Wonderful are your works; my soul knows it very well. My frame was not hidden from you, when I was being made in secret, intricately woven in the depths of the earth. Your eyes saw my unformed substance; in your book were written, every one of them, the days that were formed for me, when as yet there was none of them. (Ps 139:13-16)

Now the word of the LORD came to me, saying, "Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, and before you were born I consecrated you; I appointed you a prophet to the nations." (Jer 1:4-5)

As you do not know the way the spirit comes to the bones in the womb of a woman with child, so you do not know the work of God who makes everything. (Eccl 11:5)

Thus says the LORD who made you, who formed you from the womb and will help you. . . . (Isa 44:2)⁶⁸

Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity, and in sin did my mother conceive me. (Ps 51:5)⁶⁹

And I [Paul] was advancing in Judaism beyond many of my own age among my people, so extremely zealous was I for the traditions of my fathers. But when he who had set me apart before I was born, and who called me by his grace, was pleased to reveal his Son to me, in order that I might preach him among the Gentiles, I did not immediately consult with anyone. (Gal 1:14-16).

The Unborn Responds to God

⁶⁸ "Thus says the LORD, your Redeemer, who formed you from the womb. . ." (Isa 44:24a).

⁶⁹ Note that only a human being who is alive can be sinful.

... for he will be great before the Lord... and he will be filled with the Holy Spirit, even from his mother's womb. Lk. 1:15

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, "For behold, when the sound of your greeting came to my ears, the baby in my womb leaped for joy." (Luke 1:41-44)

*Prohibitions against Unlawful Killing*⁷⁰

Whoever sheds the blood of man, by man shall his blood be shed, for God made man in his own image. (Gen 9:6)

You shall not murder. (Exod 20:13)

Then the king of Egypt said to the Hebrew midwives, "When you serve as midwife to the Hebrew women and see them on the birthstool, if it is a son, you shall kill him, but if it is a daughter, she shall live." But the midwives feared God and did not do as the king of Egypt commanded them, but let the male children live. (Exod 1:15-18)

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. . . . But if there is harm, then you shall pay life for life. (Exod 21:22-23)⁷¹

⁷⁰ See also Amos 1:13 and 2 Kings 8:12 concerning pregnant women.

⁷¹ For an exegetical study of this passage which argues that the fetus in the womb is considered by God to be a human life at any stage of development, see Meredith Kline, "*Lex Talionis* and the Human Fetus," *JETS* 20, no. 3 (1977): 193-201. For an alternative interpretation of the *talion* formula that ultimately arrives at the same conclusion concerning the moral status of the unborn child, see Matthew Flannagan, "Feticide, The Masoretic Text, and the Septuagint", *WTJ* 74, no. 1 (Spring 2012): 59-84. Also, Russell Fuller, "Exodus 21:22-23: The Miscarriage Interpretation and the Personhood of the Fetus," *JTS* 37, no. 2 (June 1994): 169-84.

This biblical data unequivocally teaches us the following:

- (1) God is the Creator of all human life.
- (2) Human life begins at conception, and all people are sinners from conception.
- (3) God distinguishes between children inside and outside the womb, but considers them both equally human.⁷²
- (4) The taking of life in the womb or outside the womb with prior deliberation (which is the case with an abortion) is tantamount to murder.
- (5) The fetus is to be afforded legal protection by civil authorities.⁷³
- (6) It is appropriate to disobey civil authorities if one is being ordered or coerced into unlawfully killing a child, whether born or unborn.⁷⁴

⁷² Kline calls this “a continuum of identity” (*Lex Talionis*, 200).

⁷³ The context of Romans 13 and 1 Peter 2:13-17 indicates that the governing authorities are supposed to approve of good conduct, not legislate, advocate, and promote laws and public policies that allow citizens to freely commit legalized infanticide. Christians ought to recognize legalized abortion as an “impious decree.” Calvin writes, “With what conscience will they [civil magistrates] subscribe *impious decrees* with that hand which they know has been appointed to write the acts of God? In a word, if they remember that they are the vice regents of God, it behooves them to watch with all care, vigilance, and industry, that they may in themselves exhibit a kind of image of the Divine Providence, guardianship, goodness, benevolence, and justice” (cf. 1 Kgs 12:28-30; Hosea 5:11, 13; John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion: Of Civil Government*, 4.20.6).

⁷⁴ Romans 13:1-7 teaches that we are to submit to the civil authorities, but the command is not absolute when other biblical data are considered. This admonition by Paul is hedged by extreme circumstances, such as (1) The midwives' disobedience of Pharaoh to kill the firstborn sons in Exodus 1:15-18; (2) Daniel's disobedience of King Darius in Daniel 6:6-13; (3) Peter and the apostles' disobedience

Some professing Christians tend to focus on the fact that there is not specific mention of abortion in the Bible, and therefore, we do not have warrant to oppose it. Technically speaking, this lack of mention is correct. However, the above passages certainly demolish such a superficial, intellectually lazy, and morally suspect argument.

Two ancient Jewish authors reveal the moral revulsion of ancient Judaism toward abortion and infanticide, which stood in stark contrast to the pagan world around them. Josephus writes:

The [Mosaic] Law . . . forbids women to cause abortion of what is begotten, or to kill it afterward; and if any woman appears to have done so, she will be a murderer of her child, by killing a living creature and diminishing human kind.⁷⁵

Pseudo-Phocylides, a Jew living in the first-second century AD, also wrote,

“Do not apply your hand violently to tender children” and “Do not let a woman destroy the unborn babe in her belly, nor after its birth throw it before the dogs and the vultures as a prey.”⁷⁶

Meredith Kline provides us with an excellent summary, an indictment on modern America, and, by inference, an indictment on members of the church who cooperate or partner with any ideology that endorses abortion:

The most significant thing about abortion legislation in Biblical law is that there is none. 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. . . . The Middle Assyrian laws attest to an abhorrence that was felt for this crime even in

of the Sanhedrin in Acts 5:29; (4) Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego's disobedience of Nebuchadnezzar in Daniel 3.

⁷⁵ Josephus, *Contra Apionem* 2.202.

⁷⁶ Pseudo-Phocylides, 150, 184–85.

the midst of the heathendom around Israel, lacking though it did the illumination of special revelation. For in those laws a woman guilty of abortion was condemned to be impaled on stakes. . . . It is hard to imagine a more damning commentary on what is taking place in enlightened America today than that provided by this legal witness out of the conscience of benighted ancient paganism!⁷⁷

The New Testament and Abortion

The Christian who erroneously tries to separate the OT from the NT misses the unmistakable fact that the moral content of the OT legislation under Moses has not been abrogated by the mission of Jesus and the apostles. *The Westminster Confession of Faith* 19:5 summarizes this well:

The moral law binds all people at all times to obedience, both those who are justified and those who are not. The obligation to obey the moral law is not only because of its content, but also because of the authority of God the Creator, who gave it. In the gospel, Christ in no way dissolves this obligation, but greatly strengthens it (MESV).⁷⁸

We can conclude from the content of Scripture that moral admonitions found in the law of the OT are still binding on the Christian. An abortion would fall under the sin of murder, which is expressly forbidden in the NT (Matt 5:21, 19:18; Mark 10:19; Luke 18:20; 1 Tim 1:8-11; Rom 1:29, 13:9; Jas 2:11).

The Didache

⁷⁷ Kline, *Lex Talionis*, 193, 200-201.

⁷⁸ Romans 13:8-10; Ephesians 6:2; 1 John 2:3-4, 7-8. James 2:10-11; Matthew 5:17-19; Romans 3:31; James 2:8.

While the NT, like the Old, does not directly mention abortion,⁷⁹ one of the earliest documents of church history explicitly mentions the practice, and condemns it. *The Didache*, also called the *Teaching of the Twelve Apostles*, is a late first-century AD Christian document and is one of the earliest non-canonical Christian texts known to exist.⁸⁰ For a period of time, some church fathers considered it to be part of the NT canon. It was previously known only through secondary sources, such as Eusebius's *Ecclesiastical History*. Approximately the size of the epistle to the Galatians, it contains three main sections, primarily dealing with Christian ethical conduct.

Chapter two contains a list of prohibitions, clearly derived from Old and New Testament ethical admonitions. Of particular interest is *Didache* 2:2, which states,

You shall not murder. You shall not commit adultery. You shall not corrupt children, you shall not fornicate. You shall not steal. You shall not practice magic. You shall not mix poison. You shall not murder a child, *whether by abortion or by killing it once it is born*.

Several important observations should be made from this important text. First, we clearly see that the earliest Christians recognized that a child's life should be protected, whether inside

⁷⁹ An interesting proposal has been put forth by Brewer concerning the apostolic decree of Acts 15: 28-29. He states, "This paper argues that the Apostolic Decree refers to infanticide when it condemns 'smothering' (pniktoçv)—a rare word which is used especially with regard to killing infant animals—not 'strangling,' which is a very difficult way to kill an animal." For more, see his proposal in David Instone Brewer, "Infanticide and the Apostolic Decree of Acts 15," *JETS* 52, no. 2 (2009): 301-21.

⁸⁰ For more extensive detail on the *Didache*, see Hubertus van de Sautd and David Flusser, *The Didache: Its Jewish Sources and Its Place in Early Judaism and Christianity* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 2002). See also Kurt Niederwimmer and Harold W. Attridge, trans. Linda M. Maloney, *The Didache: A Commentary* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 1998).

or outside the womb. Second, there is no distinction made concerning personhood; both are equally human. The Greek term used here for child is τέκνον, commonly found in the NT, and referring to children of varying ages. The non-canonical *Epistle of Barnabas* (19:5) contains almost identical phraseology.⁸¹ The early church properly recognized the unborn child as a τέκνον, and so should we. Third, the writer uses distinct terms to distinguish the act of killing the child inside or outside the womb. For the child outside the womb, the common NT Greek term for killing is used, ἀποκτείνω. For killing the unborn child in the womb, the specific Greek term used is φθορᾶς, which is often translated as corruption, ruin, or decay (cf. Rom 8:21).⁸² Ancient writers such as Josephus, Plutarch, Philo, and Clement of Alexandria use this particular term to describe ancient abortion as well.⁸³

The author of the *Didache* no doubt mentions abortion and the killing of infants because of their prevalence in the ancient world. The medical risks associated with aborting a child in the womb were great, yet there was still a willingness to commit such a dangerous and horrific act.⁸⁴ Killing a newborn through abandonment or suffocation was much more common.

Consider, for example, an excerpt from a letter from a certain Hilarion to his “sister” (i.e., his wife), in which he tries to

⁸¹ “Do not abort a fetus or kill a child that is already born. . . . For they love what is vain, and pursue a reward, showing no mercy to the poor nor toiling for the oppressed; they are prone to slander, not knowing the one who made them; murderers of children and corruptors of what God has fashioned” (*Epistle of Barnabas* 19.5; 20.2).

⁸² φθορᾶς and its variations are found in numerous ancient writings, most having negative connotations of death, destruction, ruin, decay, etc. (*TDNT*, 9:93-106).

⁸³ Niederwimmer and Attridge, *Didache*, 89-90, 15n.

⁸⁴ For an in-depth study of ancient abortion see Konstantinos Kapparis, *Abortion in the Ancient World* (London: Gerald Duckworth, 2002).

manage family life while earning a living in the distant metropolis of Alexandria:

Hilarion to his sister Alis, many greetings, likewise to my lady [his mother] and Apollonarion [likely his son]. Know that we are still even now in Alexandria. Do not worry if they all come back and I stay in Alexandria. I urge and beg you, be concerned about the child and if I receive my wages soon, I will send them up to you. *If by chance you give birth, if it is a boy, let it be, if it is a girl, expose it.* You have said to Aphrodisias, “Do not forget me.” How can I forget you? So, I urge you not to worry.⁸⁵

Discovered amongst thousands of other papyri in the late nineteenth century at Oxyrhynchus, Egypt, this letter exemplifies alarming ancient attitudes towards infants and children. Note the casual and flippant way in which the father discusses family business, *tells the mother to expose the baby*, and then returns to other business concerns.

We can only imagine the millions and millions of similarly casual conversations taking place in the present day, whereby an abortion is flippantly and casually considered. These modern conversations mirror the same kinds of malevolent sentiments found in this disturbing ancient letter.

CONCLUSION

The archaeological record and the historical sources support the assertion that child sacrifice took place at Carthage on a large scale in antiquity. The Phoenicians were Canaanite, both in their origin and cultural practices. Attempts to overturn this understanding of the archaeological record are extremely problematic. The Carthaginian *tophet* and related archaeological finds in the Levant affirm the historicity of the OT passages. The OT testifies explicitly that child sacrifice was taking place in

⁸⁵ POxy 744, The Oxyrhynchus Papyri (emphasis added). The Greek word for “expose” ἐκβαλε, is used here, which often means “cast out” in the NT (ἐὰν ἦν θήλεια ἐκβαλε). Cf. Matthew 9:25, 34; 21:12, 39; 25:30; Luke 9:40; 11:20; John 2:15.

Canaan as early as the fifteenth century BC, was continued down through several centuries by the indigenous Canaanites not driven out during the conquest, and tragically adopted by the Israelites during the Judges and Kingdom periods. The direct result was the wrathful judgment of God upon the nation of Israel.

Further, the totality of biblical evidence is indisputable in its presentation of human life beginning at conception as a creation of God, that abortion and infanticide are synonymous with murder, that the practice of abortion was condemned by both Judaism and the early church, and that is morally incumbent upon the modern church to oppose abortion, whether in private discussions or as a matter of public policy.

Forty years have now passed since abortion was legalized in America. Since then, over 55 million unborn children have perished at the secularist and autonomous altar of self, a death toll that now exceeds the casualty numbers of the Second World War. Despite intense opposition to abortion by various cultural forces, the anti-Christian death cult continues to grow louder and louder and more evil. The modern spirit of arrogant, self-centered and god-like human autonomy is exemplified by these terrifying sentiments recently published on Salon.com by Mary Elizabeth Williams. With a breathtaking arrogance echoing Nazi Germany's Nuremberg Laws, Williams states,

Here's the complicated reality in which we live: **All life is not equal.** That's a difficult thing for liberals like me to talk about, lest we wind up looking like death-panel-loving, kill-your-grandma-and-your-precious-baby storm troopers. Yet a fetus can be a human life without having the same rights as the woman in whose body it resides. She's the boss. Her life and what is right for her circumstances and her health should automatically trump the rights of the non-autonomous entity inside of her. Always.⁸⁶

⁸⁶ Quoted in Henry B. Smith Jr., "Unmasked Evil from the Modern Day Cult of Molech," Associates for Biblical Research, <<http://www.biblearchaeology.org/post/2013/02/01/Unmasked-Evil-From-the-Modern-Day-Cult-of-Molech.aspx>> (accessed 7 March 2013).

In an evil candor rarely seen from the provocateurs of all things anti-Christian, Williams goes on to enlighten the reader that the child inside his/her mother's womb is "a life worth sacrificing."⁸⁷

Considering God's attitude of wrathful anger towards the Israelites when it came to child sacrifice, do Christians really think our nation (and the church) is exempt from wrathful, divine displeasure when we defend, support, or ignore the practice of legalized infanticide? Christian Americans in particular, with the infallible guide of God's special revelation, and the freedom to worship the Lord Jesus with nominal persecution, ought to know better. We will be held to a higher account on the day of judgment.

It is my sincere hope that the reader will be motivated to humbly ask God what actions he or she might take in good Christian conscience concerning abortion in the present day, which is plainly and unequivocally a modern-day manifestation of child sacrifice. May we repent and turn from any semblance of cooperation with the modern day cult of Molech, and hear and apply the command of the Spirit of Christ through Paul: "Take no part in the unfruitful works of darkness, but instead expose them" (Eph 5:11). May we also pray for our churches, ourselves, and our nation, that we might have the moral courage to oppose this malignant and malevolent modern-day child sacrifice.

⁸⁷ Ibid.