

Killing Newborns In Ancient Greece And Rome

They try to justify murder

Proverbs 14:12 and 16:25 warn us: “*There is a way that seems right to a man, but its end is the way of death.*” In his “Life of Lycurgus”, the Greek historian Plutarch (48-122 A.D.) records that in Sparta in ancient Greece, the Spartan elders examined all newborn babies and ordered that any who were not well-built and sturdy were to be killed by leaving them in the bush at the foot of Mount Taygetus: ¹ “*Offspring was not reared at the will of the father, but was taken and carried by him to a place called Lesche, where the elders of the tribes officially examined the infant, and if it was well-built and sturdy, they ordered the father to rear it, and assigned it one of the nine thousand lots of land; but if it was ill-born and deformed, they sent it to the so-called Apothetae, a chasm-like place at the foot of Mount Taygetus, in the conviction that the life of that which nature had not well equipped at the very beginning for health and strength, was of no advantage either to itself or the state.*” Such new-borns starved or froze to death or were eaten by wild animals. ²

Note that Plutarch said that the elders of the Spartan tribes had the right to decide which baby lived and which was killed. Also Plutarch records that Lycurgus adopted the philosophy that any baby which was not very healthy and strong was no advantage to itself or to the state. This is the same type of utilitarian and ends-justifies-the-means reasoning which Adolf Hitler and his Nazi criminals used in Germany in the late 1930’s and early 1940’s in relation to murdering newborn children with deformities.

The Greek historian Herodotus (approximately 484-424 B.C.) records that the King of Medes ordered a newborn baby be killed: “*The herdsmen made haste to answer the summons, and Harpagus said to him: ‘The king’s orders are that you must expose this infant in the wildest spot you know of amongst the hills, where it may soonest die.’*” ³ Here we see that the Medes’ practice of murdering newborn babies involved similar methods to that used by the pagan Greeks and Romans – abandoning the babies on hills or mountains. The Medes and Persians had a powerful empire and conquered Babylon in the time of the prophet Daniel (see Daniel 5:28, 5:31-6:9 and 8:20). The Book of Esther refers to the Medes and Persians also.

Ancient Greeks finding excuses to murder newborn babies

In his writing “Theaetetus”, the Greek philosopher Plato quoted Socrates saying that children with any defects should be killed: “*For we must take care that we don’t overlook some defect in **this thing** that is entering into life; it may be something not worth bringing up, a wind-egg, a falsehood. What do you say? Is it your opinion that your child ought in any case to be brought up and not*

¹ Plutarch, “Life of Lycurgus”, 16.

² Ibid.

³ Herodotus, “The Histories”, Book 1, 110.

*exposed to die? Can you bear to see it found fault with and not get into a rage if your first-born is stolen away from you?"*⁴

Socrates argues here that we should murder newborn babies with any physical defects so they can avoid other people finding fault with them.

In his play "Ion", the ancient Greek dramatist Euripides (485-406 B.C.) had his main female character named Kreusa (Kre) discuss with her female slave known as Old Servant (O.S.) the fact that Kreusa exposed her unwanted baby to death. Kreusa was Queen of Athens and the wife of Xuthus, the king-consort of Athens. Euripides' words illustrate another excuse ancient Greeks used to murder their unwanted new-borns:

O.S. And how didst thou conceal Apollo's rape?

Kre. I travailed – bear to hear my tale, old friend!

O.S. Who tended thee?...alone in trial's hour!

Kre. Alone within the cave that saw my rape.

O.S. And the boy, where? – that thou no more be childless.

Kre. Dead is he, ancient – unto beasts cast out.

O.S. Dead? – and Apollo, traitor! helped thee nought?

Kre. Helped not. The child is nursed in Hades' halls.

O.S. Who cast him forth? – Not thou – O never thou!

Kre. Even I. My vesture darkling swaddled him.

*O.S. Nor any knew **the exposing of the child**?*

Kre. None – Misery and Secrecy alone.

O.S. How couldst thou leave thy babe within the cave?

Kre. Ah how? – O pitiful farewells I moaned!

O.S. Poor heart of steel! – O God's heart harder yet!

Kre. Ah, hadst thou seen the babe's hands stretched to me!

O.S. Seeking the breast, or cradle of thine arms?

Kre. Where he lay not, and so had wrong of me.

O.S. And in what hope didst thou cast forth the babe?

Kre. That the God yet would save him – his own child.

Note that Kreusa tried to justify her wicked murder by saying she hoped God would save the child from death. She called the child "his own child", meaning God owned the child and therefore was primarily responsible if it lived or died. But she ignored the fact that God had put the child in her delegated care and she was therefore guilty of murder if the child died as a result of its exposure in the bush.

In his play "The Arbitration", the Greek dramatist Menander (343-293 B.C.) had one of his main characters, the slave Onesimos say the following about Onesimos' master raping a girl: "He lost this ring last year at the Tauropolia – An all-night song-and-dance for women. It's pretty clear what happened was, a girl got raped, and had this child; and then, of course, exposed it."⁵

Note Onesimos said that "...a girl got raped, and had this child; and then, of course, exposed it." By using the words "of course", he was saying that it was normal in Athens and/or Greece at that time to murder any newborn babies which were the result of rape.

In modern times, many insist that babies produced by rape should be considered for abortion. The ancient Athenians and/or Greeks in Menander's time believed that babies who were the result of rape should be left to die out in the bush. Modern supporters of abortions in rape cases and the ancient Athenians and/or Greeks probably used similar ends-justifies-the-

⁴ Plato, "Theaetetus", 161a.

⁵ Menander, "The Arbitration", 234-236.

means arguments to support such killings of innocent children. They believed the philosophy that two wrongs make a right.

In ancient Greece, some females aborted their own unwanted babies. In his “Sayings of Spartan Women”, the Greek biographer Plutarch (48-122 A.D.) wrote about a girl in ancient Sparta in Greece: “A girl had secret relations with a man, and, after bringing on an abortion...”⁶

In the 200’s B.C., the Greek poet Posidippus wrote, “Everybody raises a son even if he is poor, but exposes a daughter even if he is rich.”⁷ Posidippus indicates that many wealthy and poorer Greeks murdered their newborn daughters. This was partly due to the ancient pagan Greek attitude that females were very inferior to males.

Greek attitudes to marriage and infanticide in the 100’s B.C.

The ancient Greek historian Polybius (approx. 200-118 B.C.) traveled extensively throughout Greece during his era and wrote about what happened just before Greece declined and was conquered by Rome: “***In our times the whole of Greece has suffered a shortage of children and hence a general decrease of the population, and in consequence some cities have become deserted and agricultural production has declined, although neither wars nor epidemics were taking place continuously. Now if anyone had proposed that we should consult the gods to find out what we should say or do as to increase our numbers and repopulate our cities, his advice would have been considered quite futile, since the cause of this situation was self-evident and the remedy lay within our own power. This evil grew upon us rapidly and overtook us before we were aware of it, the simple reason being that men had fallen prey to inflated ambitions, love of money and indolence, with the result that they were unwilling to marry, or if they did marry, to bring up the children that were born to them; or else they would only rear one or two out of a large number, so as to leave these well off and able in turn to squander their inheritance. For in cases where there are only one or two children and one is killed off by war and the other by sickness, it is obvious that the family home is left unoccupied, and ultimately, just as happens with swarms of bees, little by little whole cities lose their resources and cease to flourish.***”⁸

The above shows how common abortion and murdering unwanted children after birth became in Greece before its fall to Rome.

Soranus – the famous gynecologist, obstetrician and mass murderer

Soranus of Ephesus (lived late 1st and early 2nd centuries A.D.) was one of the most famous Greek medical doctors in the ancient Roman world. He was a physician, gynecologist and obstetrician who assisted female midwives at difficult labours.

Soranus’ book “Gynecology” was very popular among other medical physicians in the Roman Empire in following centuries. In one section of this book, he gave instructions about how to determine whether to kill newborn children: “***vi (xxvi). How to Recognize the Newborn That Is Worth Rearing***

10 (79). Now the midwife, having received the newborn, should first put it upon the earth, having examined beforehand whether the infant is male or female, and should make an announcement by signs as is the custom of women. She should also consider whether it is worth rearing or not. And the infant which is suited by nature for rearing will be distinguished by the fact that its mother has spent the period

⁶ Plutarch, “Sayings of Spartan Women”, 242, 26.

⁷ Fragment II, Kock, quoted in Sue Blundell, “Women in Ancient Greece”, British Museum Press, 1995, page 131.

⁸ Polybius, “The Rise of the Roman Empire”, Book 36, 17.

of pregnancy in good health, for conditions which require medical care, especially those of the body, also harm the fetus and enfeeble the foundations of its life. Second, by the fact that it has been born at the due time, best at the end of nine months, and if it so happens, later; but also after only seven months. Furthermore by the fact that when put on the earth it immediately cries with proper vigor. For one that lives for some length of time without crying, or cries but weakly, is suspected of behaving so on account of some unfavorable condition. Also by the fact that it is perfect in all its parts, members and senses; that its ducts, namely of the ears, nose, pharynx, urethra, anus are free from obstruction; that the natural functions of every <member> are neither sluggish nor weak; that the joints bend and stretch; that it has due size and shape and is properly sensitive in every respect. This we may recognize from pressing the fingers against the surface of the body, for it is natural to suffer pain from everything that pricks or squeezes. And by conditions contrary to those mentioned, the infant not worth rearing is recognized.”⁹

Murdering newborns through drowning or exposure to cold, hunger or animals

In his writing “Ad Nationes”, Tertullian (approx. 155-220 A.D.) records how many pagans in the Roman Empire in the late 100’s and early 200’s A.D. used to murder their newborn children: “...because, although you are forbidden by the laws to slay new-born infants, it so happens that no laws are evaded with more impunity or greater safety, with the deliberate knowledge of the public, and the suffrages of this entire age...But then you make away with them in a more cruel manner, because you expose them to the cold and hunger, and to wild beasts, or else you get rid of them by the slower death of drowning.”¹⁰

Tertullian states that at the time, the Romans had laws against killing newborn children but that no offenders were ever prosecuted even though the identities of these murderers were well known to the general public.

Roman women caring more for their birds than their newborn babies

In his Book 3 of his writing “Instructor”, Clement of Alexandria (approx. 150-215 A.D.) wrote how many Roman women at his time cared more about birds than they did their own newborn babies. They murdered their newborns but looked after their parrots and curlews well: “And though maintaining parrots and curlews, they do not receive the orphan child; but they expose children that are born at home, and take up the young of birds, and prefer irrational to rational creatures.”¹¹ Curlews were long-billed wading birds.

These ancient women were similar to those today who abort their unwanted babies or permit hospitals to starve their newborn babies with disabilities to death but then protest against the killing of wild birds and whales.

God wants us to care for birds, whales and the natural environment He has created. But He hates the wicked ancient and modern practice in which people value animals, fish and trees more than babies.

⁹ Soranus, “Gynecology”, Book 2, Section 6.

¹⁰ Tertullian, “Ad Nationes”, Book 1, Chapter 15.

¹¹ Clement of Alexandria, “The Instructor”, Book 3, Chapter 4.

Roman “tolerance” about infanticide and sex with child prostitutes

Clement of Alexandria also records that numerous Roman fathers who exposed their newborn baby girls and boys, probably later had sex with these sons or daughters at brothels: *“For fathers, unmindful of children of theirs that have been exposed, often without their knowledge, have intercourse with a son that has debauched himself, and daughters that are prostitutes; and license in lust shows them to be the men that have begotten them. These things your wise laws allow: people may sin legally; and the execrable indulgence in pleasure they call a thing indifferent.”*¹²

In Roman times, many babies who were left abandoned in the bush after their births, were picked up or sold to brothel owners. When the babies became older, their owners instructed them in being child prostitutes and then adult prostitutes. Clement satirically attacked these practices saying: *“These things your wise laws allow...”* and adds that the Romans regarded these wicked practices as ethically *“indifferent”*.¹³ During Clement’s time, most Romans tolerated men having sex with male and female child prostitutes, even if these were originally the men’s own children. The Romans were so tolerant and “enlightened” that they opposed homophobia and paedophilia.

A Nobel Prize winner advocating Spartan, Roman and Nazi murders

Another indication of the step by step ethical decline in Western society and spread of wicked ancient Greek and Roman-like ends-justifies-the-means philosophies of many of the ancient Greeks and Romans can be seen in the following: Author Leonard Sweet records that recently a Nobel Prize winner in the field of genetics *“proposed that children not be declared living until three days after birth to give parents a choice of destroying their ‘deformed’ children, who are defined as devoid of ‘meaningful humanhood’.”*¹⁴

The above is a return to the wicked murderous practices of the ancient Spartan Greeks and of famous Roman doctors like Soranus of Ephesus. The fact that the Swedish institution which gives out Nobel prizes for *peace*, medicine, physics, chemistry and literature could give a prize to someone who advocated the murder of millions of little children typifies the unbelievable *hypocrisy* of many humanistic “do-gooders” in our present Western world. These foolish individuals think they can promote the causes of world peace by behaving like Nazi mass-murderers removing unwanted people from Earth.

Infanticide in Egypt in 1 B.C.

In the Oxyrhynchus Papyri 744 written in 1 B.C., a man named Hilarion from Oxyrhynchus in Egypt wrote to his wife Alis insisting that she expose their new-born baby to death if it was a girl: *“I send you my warmest greetings. I want you to know that we are still in Alexandria. And please don’t worry if all the others come home but I remain in Alexandria. I beg you and entreat you to take care of the child and, if I receive my pay soon, I will send it up to you. If you have the*

¹² Ibid, Book 3, Chapter 3.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Leonard Sweet, “Health and Medicine in the Evangelical Tradition”, Trinity Press International, Valley Forge, Pennsylvania, 1994, page 100.

*baby before I return, if it is a boy, let it live; if it is a girl, expose it. You sent a message with Aphrodisias, 'Don't forget me.' How can I forget you? I beg you, then, not to worry."*¹⁵

Infanticide in ancient Rome

In his *Metamorphoses* 9: 669-684 and 704-706, the Roman writer Ovid (43 B.C.-17 A.D.) recorded an example of infanticide in ancient Rome: "*Ligdus was a freeborn man, but from a lower-class family. He was a poor man, but moral and honorable. He told his pregnant wife, when she was approaching labor, 'I pray for two things – that you may have an easy labor, and that you may bear a male child. For a daughter is too burdensome, and we just don't have the money. I hate to say this, but if you should bear a girl – I say this with great reluctance, so please forgive me – if you should bear a girl, we'll have to kill her.'* He spoke the words, and they both wept, he who had given the order and she who must carry it out. And Telethusa begged her husband over and over again to change his mind, but in vain. His mind was made up...She went into labor and gave birth to a girl."

The ancient Etruscans did not murder their newborns

In his "Deipnosophistae", the ancient writer Athenaeus stated that the ancient historian Theopompus in the forty-third book of his "Histories" recorded that the pagan Etruscans did not kill any of their children after birth: "*The Etruscans rear all the babies that are born...*"¹⁶

The ancient Germans opposed abortion and infanticide

In his writing "Germania", the Roman historian and consul Tacitus (approx 56-120 A.D.) records that the pagan tribes of Germany opposed abortion and killing of newborns. He records that among the Germans "...to limit the number of their children, to make away with any of the later children is held abominable and good habits have more force with them than good laws elsewhere."¹⁷

In the above quote, Tacitus compares the custom of the Germans to some of the laws made by the Roman Emperor Augustus (reigned 27 B.C.-14 A.D.) which attempted to stop the killing of newborns but which were ignored by many people throughout the Roman Empire.

Deliberately starving new-born babies to death

Recently in the United States, the practice of abortion has spread to doctors and nurses killing physically handicapped babies after their birth. Some American hospitals have been doing this since the 1970's. They murder the babies by deliberately starving them to death or not giving them necessary treatment. For example, a 1973 report in the *New England Journal of Medicine* openly named a hospital in the American state of Connecticut which was killing

¹⁵ Oxyrhynchus Papyri 744 (Select Papyri 105) recorded in Jo-Ann Shelton, "As the Romans did – A Sourcebook in Roman Social History", Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1998, page 28.

¹⁶ Athenaeus, "Deipnosophistae", Book 12, 517.

¹⁷ Tacitus, "Germania", 19.

babies in this way.¹⁸ This is similar to what the ancient pagan Romans and Greeks did and what the wicked dictator, Adolf Hitler commanded his Nazi doctors to do.

140,000 annually and 96% of these are unwanted by their mothers

In 1996, the abortion rate in Australia was 140,000 unborn babies a year.¹⁹ Proof that most Australian women who are murdering their babies through abortion are doing it for reasons other than rape or dangers to their own or their babies' health are the following figures from South Australia. In 1975, 94.7% of abortions were done for supposed mental problems, 0.2% for sexual assault and 3.2% for diagnosed or possible physical health problems for the mother or child.²⁰ In 1976, 1977 and 1978, the supposed mental problems category rose to 96%. This mental problem category is just a fancy name for those who do not want their unborn babies.

The murder of an unborn 7 month old baby

The April 13, 2004 edition of "The Bulletin" magazine in Australia recorded the fact that in late January 2000, doctors at Melbourne's Royal Women's Hospital killed an unborn baby which was 32 weeks old. They did this even though the Victorian Crimes Act at the time stated that it was a criminal offence for anyone to kill an unborn child over 28 weeks of age. This crime carried a maximum penalty of 15 years in prison.

The doctors killed the baby because the pregnant woman had threatened to commit suicide if they did not abort the baby. She threatened suicide after learning that her 7 month old unborn baby suffered from the non-fatal abnormality of dwarfism.

The Bulletin recorded that the doctors suggested to the woman and her husband that she give birth to the child and then give it up for adoption. But the couple rejected this option.

The Bulletin also recorded: "*Further, an internal hospital inquiry, which has never been made public, found there was some uncertainty in the diagnosis and that the woman's case notes were incomplete.*

This case would normally have remained confidential, except a staff member referred it to the hospital's adverse events committee. There were deep ethical concerns among some staff at the hospital and hospital management took the usual step of going public. It suspended the three doctors involved and referred the case to the state coroner. The hospital said at the time it was unclear from the medical records whether a lethal injection had been administered to the baby before the birth was induced.

Then, two years ago, the state coroner's office ruled it did not have the jurisdiction to investigate the termination because the baby had been born dead. But the Bulletin has learnt the acting Victorian government solicitor provided advice to the coroner that his office did have jurisdiction over the case."

The facts suggest the probability that the three relevant doctors deliberately did not complete the woman's case notes in order to cover-up what they did, the baby did receive a lethal injection and the Victorian government ordered their solicitor to advise the state coroner not to investigate the killing of the baby.

¹⁸ Ibid, page 155.

¹⁹ "Right to Life News", Right to Life Association (N.S.W.), Australia, June 1996.

²⁰ R.J. Cameron, "Social Indicators – Australia", No 3 1980, Australian Bureau of Statistics, Canberra, page 35.

The Bulletin also recorded: *“Later term abortion is performed in major obstetrics hospitals around the country in cases where serious foetal abnormality is present.”* This plus the fact that the Victorian State Government has now allowed three doctors to kill a 7 month old baby, who had no fatal abnormality and whose only problem was dwarfism, shows:

- a) The laws about moral and ethical matters in Australia are increasingly being made on the basis of fitting in with *extreme exceptions* whose so-called “human rights” come before the general good of society and/or the human rights of others. In this case, the supposed “right” of the mother to kill her 7 month old baby who could have been adopted, was taken as being a valid exception to a law protecting babies over 28 weeks old. The baby’s right to live and to be adopted were denied. As a result, this precedent means other similar exceptions can be allowed until in the end the law is changed so much that unborn babies up to 40 weeks old can be murdered by doctors.
- b) The whimperish Victorian State Government permitted three doctors to set a new standard in Australia. This new standard is that if a patient threatens suicide if the doctors do not do what the patient demands, the doctors must grant the patient’s wishes. What a stupid standard!
It is wrong to make wicked exceptions to laws and grant evil requests just to prevent someone from committing suicide.
Imagine what might happen in future times if the present watering down of laws protecting unborn and newborn babies continues. You might have numerous mixed-up women bringing their say 3 to 12 week old healthy normal babies back to hospitals saying, “If you do not kill these babies, I will commit suicide. If you try to adopt them out, I will still commit suicide.” If present trends continue, state governments in Australia will legalise infanticide or the murdering of newborns. This will result in a return to ancient Greek and Roman wicked practices.
- c) The absolute hypocrisy of many political parties in Australia today is evident in the fact that they claim to be so concerned to protect the rights of the disabled but then they permit three doctors to murder a 7 month old baby with dwarfism.

Hypocritical modern standards about abortion

Section 20 “Child murder – when child deemed born alive” in Part 3, Division 1 of the Crimes Act 1900 of the state of New South Wales in Australia reveals that the law in this particular state does not accept that a child prior to birth is a living human being:

“Child murder – when child deemed born alive

On the trial of a person for the murder of a child, such child shall be held to have been born alive if it has breathed, and has been wholly born into the world whether it has had an independent circulation or not.”

This unscientific foolish law has been operative in New South Wales since 1900.

On the front page of the September 25, 2002 edition of “The Daily Telegraph” newspaper in Sydney in Australia, there was a story which had the long title “Road rage killed Renee Shields’ unborn baby but no one will be charged because the law says he was NOT A HUMAN”.²¹ The story then explained that the legal system in New South Wales does not

²¹ “The Daily Telegraph”, Wednesday September 25, 2002, page 1.

regard any unborn baby as a living child because of the above-quoted law in Section 20 of the Crimes Act.

This foolish law does not recognise that an unborn baby of any age is a human. As a result, if someone does a violent act which causes the death of another person's unborn baby in the state of New South Wales, the violent person cannot be charged with manslaughter or murder.

At the present time, babies which are born prematurely at only 23 or 24 weeks can often survive in hospital. So even this shows how foolish is the present law.

Some politicians have proposed that the law in New South Wales must be changed to ensure that if someone besides the baby's mother violently causes the baby to die, the offender will be charged with manslaughter or murder. But if this happens it will be *blatant hypocrisy* to not also charge women who abort their unborn babies with murder. You cannot define unborn babies as humans in one context and just as sub-humans in other contexts without being an absolute hypocrite.