

I. Does the Bible teach that life begins at conception?

Section 15 and 16 deserve some rethinking too. Kenneth Gentry, particularly, has suggested that an argument could be developed that is less dependent on burden of proof and probability considerations. I am not entirely convinced that can be done, but if it could be, that would doubtless be an advantage. Still, I continue to maintain the fundamental point: even if you have some doubt that the unborn child is a person, you are biblically obligated to give to the child the *benefit of the doubt* (Frame, *Medical Ethics*, 86).

There is no way to demonstrate, either from Scripture or from science or from some combination of the two that the unborn child is a human person from the point of conception. In the case of attempted demonstrations from scientific premises alone, our present point is established by considerations already set forth (above, section 14, a) (Frame, *Medical Ethics*, 105).

14.a – At the outset, it must be seriously asked whether any narrowly scientific argument could possibly, even in principle, establish whether the unborn child is or is not a human person. The question of whether the unborn child is a human person is essentially the question of whether, from God's point of view, the child has the ontological status entitling him to a full human right to life. The question is religious, metaphysical, and ethical (Frame, *Medical Ethics*, 102).

For accuracy's sake it should be noted that the Hebrew word ordinarily translated as 'conceive' does not mean conception in the modern, technical sense of the term. The fertilization of an egg by a sperm is still in some respects mysterious to us today, even with the aid of modern technology, and the Hebrew language of 1000 CB did not have a word to describe fertilization as we know it now" (Vandrunen, *Bioethics*, 153).

So, what does the Bible teach?

II. The Biblical Data – A human being is:

A. A human being is: **Body and Soul**

Recommend Moreland & Rae, *Body and Soul* (a sophisticated argument)

What are some ramifications of this view?

1. We are more than physical, thus we cannot be explained solely in terms of physical laws or physical categories—thus, when dealing with anthropology (the study of man) & psychology (the study of the soul or mind), science alone is incompetent.
2. Our identity comes from the inside out, not the outside in. We can lose parts (and function) and still have identity through time—the Jell-O boat: is it the same boat?
3. We are, according to Scripture, a “living soul” (Gen 2:7)

Then the LORD God formed **man** of dust from the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and **man** became a **living soul**.

וַיִּצְרֶה יְהוָה אֱלֹהִים אֶת־הָאָדָם עָפָר מִן־הָאֲדָמָה וַיִּפְּחַ בְּאַפָּיו נְשָׁמַת תַּיִם וַיְהִי הָאָדָם לְנֶפֶשׁ חַיָּה:

In other words, whenever you encounter a human being, you encounter a living soul.

4. This view has explanatory power: free will; personal identity; unity and diversity overtime; moral significance, etc.
5. In light of the explanatory power of this view, we can speak of our human nature—there is something that connects us and binds us to one another. There is a common human nature, but it is individualized in each of us. This is myste-

rious and profound. It has redemptive ramifications—things like covenant representation, federal headship, imputation, and the humanity of Jesus wouldn't make sense apart from human nature (corporate humanity).

B. A human being is: **The Image of God** (Gen 1:26-27; 9:5-6; 1 Cor 11:7; 15:49; Jas 3:8-10)

1. Original righteousness, knowledge & holiness

Man was created with true righteousness, knowledge and holiness. This meant that he was created a moral being who would think God's thoughts after Him—i.e., he would love God with his thinking and understanding. He would understand his separate and unique role prophet, priest and king under God. He would fulfill the creation mandate of exercising dominion over the creation for the glory of God. Gen 1:31; Eccl 7:29; Eph 4:24; Col 3:10

2. Share in God's communicable attributes

We share in God's communicable attributes—we are “like” God in many ways. We are intelligent, have affection, we are creative, we reproduce, we are moral and volitional beings—we have a will. We have compassion, anger, patience, etc. Gen 1:26-28; Psa 8:5-6

{To be in God's image is to be in relationship with God and other human beings. . . }

3. Spiritual & Immortal

We are soulish/spiritual creatures (God is Spirit, Jn 4:24). We are not eternal, but we are immortal. Gen 2:17; 3:19; Rom 5:12; 6:23; 1 Cor 15:20-21; Rev 20

4. Reflected in our Bodies

Man's body also reflects the image of God.

Gen 1:27 God created man (הָאָדָם) in His own image, in the image of God He created him;

male (זָכָר) and female (נְקֵמָה) He created them.

Gen 2:7; Mat 10:28

Col 1:15 He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation.

“According to Scripture the essence of man consists in this, that he is the image of God” (Louis Berkhof, *Systematic Theology*, 205).

C. A human being is: **In the womb**

1. **There is human, personal life in the womb**

Gen 16:4, 11

He went in to Hagar, and she conceived; and when she saw that she had conceived, her mistress was despised in her sight.

The angel of the LORD said to her further, “Behold, you are with child (הָרָה), and you will bear a son (בֵּן); and you shall call his name Ishmael, because the LORD has given heed to your affliction.

Exo 21:22-25

“If men struggle with each other and strike a woman with child (הַרְהֵרָה) so that she gives birth prematurely (יָלְדָה יָלְדֵיָהּ – they come out children of her), yet there is no injury, he shall surely be fined as the woman's husband may demand of him, and he shall pay as the judges *decide*.

“But if there is *any further* injury, then you shall appoint as a *penalty* life for life, eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot, burn for burn, wound for wound, bruise for bruise.

“The plural הַרְהֵרָה is employed for the purpose of speaking indefinitely, because there might possibly be more than one child in the womb” (C. F. Keil, *Genesis*, 135).

LXX - καὶ ἐξέλθῃ τὸ παιδίον αὐτῆς (he, she, it comes out the child of her) μὴ ἐξεικονισμένον (not fully formed)

1 Sam 1:20; Isa 7:14

Psa 139:13-16

For You formed my inward parts; You wove me in my mother's womb. 14 I will give thanks to You, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made; Wonderful are Your works, and my soul knows it very well. 15 My frame was not hidden from You, When I was made in secret, *And skillfully* wrought in the depths of the earth; 16 Your eyes have seen my unformed substance (יָלְדָה); And in Your book were all written The days that were ordained *for me*, When as yet there was not one of them.

Luke 1:15, 41

For he will be great in the sight of the Lord; and he will drink no wine or liquor, and he will be filled with the Holy Spirit while yet in his mother's womb.

When Elizabeth heard Mary's greeting, the baby (τὸ βρέφος) leaped in her womb; and Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit.

2. Specific Passages dealing with conception

Psa 51:5

Behold, I was brought forth (חִוֵּלְתִּי) [withering in labor pains] in iniquity, and in sin my mother conceived (יָהַמָּ , יִהְיֶה לְבִנִּי) me.

“For accuracy’s sake it should be noted that the Hebrew word ordinarily translated as ‘conceive’ does not mean conception in the modern, technical sense of the term. The fertilization of an egg by a sperm is still in some respects mysterious to us today, even with the aid of modern technology, and the Hebrew language of 1000 CB did not have a word to describe fertilization as we know it now” (Vandrunen, 153).

Technically true, but the Hebrew word does seem to point back to the very beginning—*that’s the very question, though*. This is how most commentators understand it.

Calvin (5.290) – “The Hebrew word . . . signifies literally, *hath warmed herself of me* . . . but interpreters have very properly rendered it *hath conceived me*. The expression intimates that we are cherished in sin from the first moment that we are in the womb.”

Adam Clarke (Clarke’s Commentary, 3.384) – “Signifies *made me warm*, alluding to the whole process of the formation of the *fetus in utero*. . . .”

Delitzsch (5.136, 137) – “The declaration moves backwards from his birth to conception, it consequently penetrates even to the most remote point of life's beginning.” “That man from his first beginning onwards, and that this beginning itself, is tainted with sin; that the proneness to sin with its guilt and its corruption is propagated from parents to their children. . . .

Spurgeon (1.403) – “He goes back to the earliest moment of his being, not to traduce his mother, but to acknowledge the deep tap-roots of his sin.”

Can we do any better in our understanding of this term, “conceive?” Consider the parallelism of the entire Psalm.

1. Be gracious	According to your lovingkindness	2. Wash me	From my iniquity
According to greatness of your compassion	Blot out transgression	Cleanse me	From my sin

3. I know	My transgressions	4a. Against you	I have sinned
My sin	Ever before me	And done evil	In your sight

4b. You are justified	When you speak
And blameless	When you judge

5. I was brought forth	In iniquity	<p>An <i>antithetic parallelism</i> (it states the same thing using opposites—i.e., David's <i>entering</i> and <i>exiting</i> the womb)</p> <p>Now, if we are going to be precise, the question remains: When does David enter the womb?</p>
In sin	My mother conceived me	

Job 3:3

Let the day perish on which I was to be born (אֲנִלֵּד), and the night which said, 'A boy is conceived (הָרָה).'

יָלַד (yalad) bear, beget, bring forth, gender, travail. The Ugaritic yld is similar.

הָרָה (hara) bear, be with child, conceive, progenitor, be conceived, conceive.

The parallelism is the same here as in Psalm 51—the entering and exiting the womb.

So, the question becomes, when does a person enter the womb

3. Biblical “conception” explained

Gen 4:1

Now the man had relations with (יָדַע) [lit. Adam knew] his wife Eve, and she conceived (הָרָה וַתֵּלֶד) and gave birth (וַתֵּלֶד וַתֵּלֶד) to Cain, and she said, “I have gotten a manchild with *the help of the LORD.*”

יָדַע (בוא - go into) הררה ילד

To know; to be intimate / to go or come into

To conceive; be conceived

Bear, beget, bring forth

This same pattern is found throughout the OT, especially in Genesis (the book of beginnings): Gen 4:17; 16:4, 11; 19:35-38; 21:2; 29:32-35; 30:3-5, 16-19; 38:2-5; Isa 8:3; Hos 1:3, (6, 8); 1Chr 4:17; 7:3

How soon after sex is it possible for conception to take place?

Studies on early stages of development indicate that human oocytes are usually fertilized within 12 hours after ovulation. In vitro observations have shown that the oocyte cannot be fertilized after 24 hours and that it degenerates shortly thereafter. Most human sperms probably do not survive for more than 48 hours in the female genital tract (Moore & Persaud, *The Developing Human*, 31).

The sex act leads to conception. It really doesn't matter whether or not every single Israelite understood the mechanics of this or not—God certainly understands the mechanics. And, so did many of the ancients (see the story of Jacob, Gen. 30).

Keep in mind that the act of marriage—when related to children—only does one thing. And it does it within 12 to 24 hours after the “knowing”—it results in a fertilized egg. If not, nothing else happens. So when Scripture ties the “knowing,” the “going into” to “conception,” it can only mean one thing—whether the people understood the “science” or not—a fertilized egg, a human being, a person created in the image of God

Basics of early coital understanding:

1. No child apart from seed entering the womb (Gen 38:8-9)
2. Seed did not always result in a child—barrenness existed and was considered a curse ().
3. Barrenness was typically/always blamed on the woman—i.e., she to contributed to conception.

One more thing: God is sovereign over conception—it is God who opens and closes the womb (Psa 127:3; Gen 20 – Abimelech; 16:2; 1 Sam 1:5-6, 19-20; Gen 17:16; 21:2; 25:21; Ruth 4; Judg 13:3; Job 10:8ff; 12:9; 31:15; 33:4; Psa 22:9ff; 100:3; 104:30; Jer 1:5; Gal 1:15; Mat 1:18ff; Exo 4:11; Jn 9 – blind man).

III. Putting it all together

We have seen from both natural revelation (science and philosophy) and special revelation (theology) that life starts at conception.

Science

Human life begins at fertilization—the zygote is a living, totipotent cell and a member of the species *homo sapiens*. It is unlike any other cell in the human body, as it is a distinct, whole human being. It develops from the inside out on a self-guided trajectory from zygote to embryo to new born to adult.

Philosophy

Human life is *personal* life. All human beings are persons from the very beginning. Defining a person based on functionality is going in the wrong direction.

Human beings think, relate, hope and dream, are self-conscious, self-aware, self-motivated and have the ability to communicate because they are persons, because these are inherent capacities. These characteristics do not grant or bestow personhood. The frightening result of consistency is its own *reductio ad absurdum*.

Theology

Human beings are more than physical beings and thus, science cannot fully explain humanity. Human beings are spiritual in nature and the crown of God's creation. All human beings are the image of God; thus, they are personal beings. From the very beginning of existence in the womb, the human being is a person created in the image of God and in relationship with God—both creaturely and covenantally (either a covenant keeper or a covenant breaker).

When one looks at the biblical data (special revelation) and compares it to the non-biblical data of science and philosophy (natural revelation) the results are the same—at the point of conception there exists a personal human being.

Nevertheless, science and philosophy alone are impotent to adequately define human nature. **It is a religious question and God has spoken.**

IV. Sex & the Family

A. What is the biblical definition of a family?

B. The Creation Ordinance

1. Must you have children?

2. Must you have as many children as possible?

Luke 1:35-36 The angel answered and said to her, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; and for that reason the holy Child shall be called the Son of God. 36 "And behold, even your relative Elizabeth has also conceived a son in her old age; and she who was called barren is now in her sixth month.

The angel answered and said to her, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; and for that reason the holy Child (τὸ γεννώμενον ἅγιον) shall be called the Son of God. 36 "And behold, even your relative Elizabeth has also conceived a son in her old age; and she who was called barren is now in her sixth month.

τὸ γεννώμενον ἅγιον – that which is begotten; the having been begotten holy thing; the one/thing having been born is holy; the one who is born shall be called holy, the Son of God.

"This work parallels the reference in 1:15 to the Spirit's filling of Elizabeth's womb. God's Spirit is the active, life-giving agent. Such a reference corresponds with the OT and Jewish picture of God's Spirit (Ezek 37: 14 . . .)" (Bock, *Luke*, 121).

"It is crucial to recognize that this verse alludes to Exodus 40:34-35. The language of the original Greek text that describes the power of the Most High overshadowing Mary is also the language that the Septuagint . . . uses to describe the Shekinah glory cloud that overshadowed the newly completed tabernacle under the authority of Moses. This Shekinah glory cloud is frequently identified as a manifestation of the Holy Spirit himself in the Old Testament (e.g., Neh. 9:19-20; Isa. 63:11-14; Hag. 2:5) and is even identified with the Spirit of God who hovered over creation in Genesis 1:2 (as evident in the Hebrew text of Deut 32:11). . . . The Spirit overshadowed the first creation, bringing forth human beings, created in his own image and likeness as his climatic work. . . . Luke 1:35, therefore, alerts us to the fact that the son of Mary is the second Adam, the true and consummate divine image bearer" (Vandrunen, 157).