



Defending the Indefensible

BreakPoint with Charles Colson

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Infanticide and Relativism

Archaeologists excavating the site of a third-century Roman bathhouse in northern Israel came across a gruesome discovery: the skeletons of at least one hundred infants who were thrown into the ancient sewers beneath the bathhouse.

Their findings were the subject of a recent Discovery Channel program that shows just where moral relativism leads us.

DNA and other forensic analysis of the remains revealed that the children were less than a week old and that the vast majority were boys.

The evidence points to a troubling hypothesis: The murdered infants were the children of prostitutes who worked in the bathhouse. When these women gave birth, girls, who could be raised to be prostitutes, were kept. Boys, who couldn't, were thrown into the sewer.

The experts interviewed on the Discovery Channel's program, "Skeletons of Roman Ashkelon," were appalled and disturbed by their findings—but not so appalled and disturbed that they forgot the first commandment of the contemporary academy: Thou shall not judge.

So to make sure that viewers weren't too harsh on the women who tossed their newborns into the sewer, "Skeletons" provided "explanations"—actually, excuses—for their actions.

The program told viewers that infanticide was a form of population control—a way of making sure there were not too many mouths to feed. But, as we see in the Ashkelon dig, Romans killed their newborns for reasons that had nothing to do with the scarcity of food or other resources. Besides, if infanticide is a form of population control, so is genocide. After all, both practices leave you with fewer mouths to feed.

Viewers were also told that Romans had different attitudes toward newborns. Romans, unlike moderns whose attitudes toward unborn children have been "cushioned" by medical advances like ultrasound, did not regard newborn children as fully human.

Besides begging the question of whether Roman attitudes were morally justifiable, this assertion is comical. Ultrasound and similar practices are relatively new, dating back less than thirty years. Even before then, women did not leave their newborn children in the middle of the highway or abandon them in the woods or toss them in sewers.

That's because our ideas about infanticide are not the product of technology, but rather of Christianity. In the *Didache*, an early second-century document attributed to the twelve apostles, Christians are told, "You shall not procure an abortion or kill the newborn child." The "Way of Death," it says, is filled with "the murderers of children."

As Christianity's influence spread throughout the empire, the abhorrent pagan practices were replaced by Christian ones, to the obvious benefit of Roman children.

Or at least it should be obvious, except for the irrational relativism of the academics who appeared on television. In their worldview, the prostitutes of Ashkelon and the culture that shaped them were not evil, simply misunderstood; our love for our

children today is a matter of technology and convention, not the product of decency or morality. And so the academics on the "Skeletons" program may have been appalled, but for no good reason. When you hear issues like this discussed or see them on television, remind your friends and neighbors that it was the Christian worldview that put an end to what happened in places like Ashkelon.

For further information:

Wendy Gold, "[Dark side unearthed in ancient Israeli city](#)," Discovery Channel, January 20, 1997.

Mark Rose, "[Ashkelon's Dead Babies](#)," *Archaeology* 50, No. 2 (March/April 1997).

Read the [Didache](#).

BreakPoint Commentary No. 030402, "['Blue' Environmentalism: The Ecology of Liberty](#)."

BreakPoint Commentary No. 030115, "[Where 'Choice' Ends: Peru and the War against Life](#)."

Roberto Rivera, "[London Dumbstruck Blues](#)," *BreakPoint Online*, March 20, 2003 (see section at end, "She's Not a Monster; You're Judgmental").

The "[BreakPoint Culture of Life Packet](#)" includes the Family Research Council booklet *Building a Culture of Life: A Call to Respect Human Dignity in American Life* and a "BreakPoint This Week" CD interview with William Saunders of Family Research Council in which he discusses what citizens can do to make a difference for life. The CD also includes a speech by Dr. Robert George, "Bioethics and the Clash of Orthodoxies."

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