

## **Bible and the Headlines: Wetnurse**

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The ancient Greeks believed “Geography is destiny.” A Google search for “wet nurse” will show that AI believes this too. After defining a “wetnurse” as “A woman who breastfeeds and cares for another's child,” Google’s AI overview explains, “It [wet-nursing] is not as common as it once was, especially in Western countries.” The Western practice that replaced wet-nursing is the subject of recent headlines.

On May 6th, the Boston Globe presented, “After a NICU Nurse’s Infant Died, She Decided to Keep Pumping Her Breast Milk to Help Other Babies.” The woman featured in the article had worked with premature babies for years prior to her own child’s preterm delivery. Like any other preemie born at the hospital, the nurse was provided with donated breast milk until the nurse “. . . established her own milk supply, which is often delayed in preterm deliveries and complicated maternal recoveries.” Her child later died from a rare infection while she was still breastfeeding. In honor of her child, this bereaved mother decided to offer other babies the gift her child had received.

The May 19th edition of the Vancouver Sun featured, “Surrey Nurse on Maternity Leave Donates Breast Milk To Help Tiniest Patients.” Like the nurse in the previous story, this mother worked with newborns and knew the benefits babies receive from breast milk. The problem she faced was that she produced more milk than her baby could consume. The article noted, “Her milk was so abundant she filled the family’s freezer after just 3 weeks.” Not wanting this precious resource to be wasted she donated the excess milk. At the time of publication, this nurse has donated more than 26 gallons.

The Tar Heel State has a medical newsletter called, “North Carolina Health News.” In the May 20<sup>th</sup> newsletter was, “NC Works To Expand Availability of Donor Breast Milk as Demand Rises.” The article states that more than one in ten babies in North Carolina are born prematurely. The data also shows, “Breast milk helps protect premature babies’ guts and helps facilitate their growth.” The state’s only milk bank hopes to add five more collection centers by the end of 2025. The goal is to offer human milk to every medically fragile newborn in North Carolina.

The Bible contains many examples where a woman provides milk for another woman’s child. The longest milk bank narrative in Scripture begins when the Pharaoh of Egypt declared that all male Hebrew babies must be tossed into the Nile (Ex 1:22). The mother of Moses followed Pharaoh’s instruction, but she placed Moses in a raft first (Ex 2:3). Moses’ sister followed his raft until it was discovered by Pharaoh’s daughter (Ex 2:4-5). Since Pharaoh’s daughter had no breast milk of her own, Moses’ sister approached her and offered to find a milk donor (Ex 2:7). Moses’ sister brought Moses’ mother to Pharaoh’s daughter who told the “donor,” “Take this baby and nurse him for me, and I will pay you” (Ex 2:9). Moses’ mother complied with this royal instruction and became a milk donor (Ex 2:9). Her gift kept an at-risk baby alive.

In the New Testament, believers are told, “Like newborn babies, crave pure spiritual milk, so that by it you may grow up in your salvation” (1Pe 2:2). In the physical world the life-sustaining gift of human milk can only be given by women. However, “spiritual milk” can be “donated” by anyone. Jesus commanded us all to be spiritual wet nurses in the Great Commission, “Go and make disciples of all nations . . . teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you” (Matt 28:19-20). Geography is not destiny.