

Thesis 1: Contrary to the claims of some contemporary interpreters, Numbers 5 does not provide a biblical defense of elective abortion.

Pro-Choice Argument

P1: If the Bible regarded every embryo or fetus as possessing the same legal status as a born person, Numbers 5 would not permit the fetus to die because of its mother's adultery.

P2: Numbers 5 does permit a fetus to die because of its mother's adultery.

C: Therefore, the Bible does not regard every embryo or fetus as possessing the same legal status as a born person.

Problem with Premise 2

- Numbers 5 never explicitly says:
 - that the woman is pregnant; or
 - that the curse causes a miscarriage.
- The Hebrew of the passage is ambiguous: her "thigh" will "fall" and her "abdomen will swell" may refer to future barrenness, or something else.
- The NIV's reference to miscarriage is an *interpretation*, not a wooden translation of the Hebrew text.

Problem with Premise 1

- Even if we assume that the woman is pregnant and that the curse causes a miscarriage, the passage would show that God may take an unborn life in divine judgment.
- It would not follow that:
 - the unborn child therefore has lesser moral worth;
 - or human beings are authorized to intentionally terminate an unborn child's life.
- Divine prerogative $\neq$ human authorization.
- If the miscarriage interpretation is correct, Numbers 5 raises a serious question about divine judgment and the problem of evil. But that is different from establishing the permissibility of elective abortion.

Thesis 2: Because YHWH dwells in the midst of Israel, His people are called to holiness and covenant faithfulness. Numbers 5–6 presents two contrasting paths before Israel: straying from YHWH (Ch. 5) and consecrating oneself to YHWH (Ch. 6).

The Strayed Woman

- Straying (away from YHWH) → potential defilement → judgment
- The woman of Numbers 5 has wandered from covenant faithfulness, although the text leaves open how far she has strayed.

The Nazirite

- “Nazirite” means “one consecrated” or “one separated”.
- Separation (unto YHWH) → consecration/holiness
- In Numbers 6, either a man or woman may voluntarily separate himself or herself to YHWH through the Nazirite vow.
- The Nazirite resembles Israel's priests: special consecration brings special restrictions, including restrictions concerning contact with the dead.

The Question for Israel

- Will she stray from YHWH and give herself to another (god), or will she consecrate herself to YHWH who has proven Himself a faithful, loving Husband?

Numbers 5 Strayed Woman	Numbers 6 Consecrated Nazirite (man or woman)
Wanders from YHWH	Draws near to YHWH
Potential Defilement	Intensified Holiness