

## A BIBLICAL WORLDVIEW ON IVF

Infertility. It's a diagnosis that millions of married couples have struggled with. These couples endure strong emotional struggles as they evaluate what this label means for their lives and research the alternatives. Years ago, a married couple did not have many choices available if natural reproduction was not an option. Adoption was an alternative, but there were few others. Today, thanks to diligent research, an infertile couple has many choices. Adoption, of course, is still a viable option; but other alternatives, such as in vitro fertilization, surrogate mothers, artificial insemination, and a whole myriad of fertility drugs, are now available. A Christian couple that has been diagnosed as infertile should and must carefully and prayerfully research their options; to take the next step in an emotionally unstable frame of mind can create many more difficult decisions further down the road. This article will examine just one alternative that is being offered to infertile couples—in vitro fertilization—and will illuminate a few difficult decisions it could create for the affected couple.

When seeking ways to bring children into their lives, in vitro fertilization (IVF) is an option presented to many infertile couples. IVF is a process that manually combines an egg and sperm in a laboratory dish. Fertility drugs and a minor surgical procedure allow the doctor to harvest the egg from the woman, but because some eggs will not develop or fertilize after the procedure, multiple eggs are drawn during the surgery in the hopes that at least one egg will be fertilized (1). In a process called *insemination*, both sperm and eggs are placed in incubators located in the laboratory; this process enables fertilization to occur. The eggs are monitored to confirm that fertilization and cell division are taking place. Once this occurs, the fertilized eggs are called *embryos*. When IVF is successful, the process is combined with a procedure known as *embryo transfer*, which physically places the embryo in the uterus. Typically, four embryos are transferred at a time; this increases the probability that pregnancy will occur (1). In some cases, the embryos “take” and the baby (or babies) begins to grow in the womb. In other cases, the embryo(s) does not “take”, and more embryos (from the non-implanted embryos) are planted

in the womb. The process continues until 1) the embryo comes to full term and is delivered, or 2) the couple runs out of money or emotional/physical stamina to proceed any further.

The question that arises, however, is complicated: What happens to the leftover embryos if the first embryos that are planted in the womb “take”? These embryos are kept frozen and are in storage as they await their fate. Research reveals that there are five options from which husband and wife can choose: proceed with the embryo transfer and raise the babies that come to full term, pay monthly or yearly storage fees to keep the embryos frozen, donate the embryos to infertile couples, thaw the embryo without donating it (thus ending its existence), or donate the embryo for stem cell research (thus likewise ending its existence).

To help make this decision from a Biblical worldview, the couple must understand at what point life is created. Is the frozen embryo an actual life or is it simply a mass of cells? In Jeremiah 1:5 the Lord tells the prophet Jeremiah, “Before I formed thee in the belly I knew thee; and before thou camest forth out of the womb I sanctified thee, and I ordained thee a prophet unto the nations.” God had a specific will for Jeremiah before he ever entered the world—before he was ever formed in the belly. Isaiah had similar words in chapter 49:1 (“Listen, O isles, unto me; and hearken, ye people, from far; The LORD hath called me from the womb; from the bowels of my mother hath he made mention of my name.”) These verses clearly show that God has a specific purpose for every life...whether he enters the world or not. In Psalm 139:13, David mentions that God “covered (sheltered, protected) me in my mother’s womb.” God would not need to protect or shelter something that was not alive – much as there is no need to protect a rock or a slab of concrete. Because God has specific plans for each human before birth, and because He protects babies in the womb, one can conclude that life does, indeed, exist in the womb. But at what stage of development does life begin? At conception? During the third trimester? There are many differing views and diverse definitions. Perhaps the most succinct definition, however, comes from a source called *National Right To Life*: “The life of a baby begins long before he or she is born. A new individual human being begins at fertilization, when the sperm and ovum meet to form a single cell. If the baby’s life is not interrupted, he or she will someday

become an adult man or woman” (2). Since life occurs *at* fertilization, IVF creates life in the incubators during the process of insemination. Just because these embryos do not have a womb in which to grow does not make them any less full of life than other embryos.

Given that the embryos left in the lab are, indeed, living babies, the choices concerning what to do with the ‘leftover’ embryos become clearer when viewed from a Biblical worldview. God values life and absolutely does not condone murder (Exodus 20:13). He has a purpose for each and every life that begins—whether in the womb or in an incubator. Christians who are infertile—and the pastors who counsel them—must be well informed in the choices that lay before them. Not only must they be well aware of their choices, but they must also understand all the ramifications associated with each option. May the contents of this article help married couples to be well informed, and simultaneously encourage them to prayerfully make Godly decisions. And may those decisions reflect the value that God Himself places on each and every life that comes into existence.

**Published October 2009**