

Green Plants For Food – The Original Biblical Vegetarian Diet

by Jim Schicatano

Then God said, “I give you every seed-bearing plant on the face of the whole earth and every tree that has fruit with seed in it. They will be yours for food. And to all the beasts of the earth and all the birds of the air and all the creatures that move on the ground – everything that has the breath of life in it – I give every green plant for food.” And it was so. God saw all that he had made, and it was very good. And there was evening, and there was morning – the sixth day.
– (*Gen. 1:29-31 NIV*)

It is intriguing to notice that originally neither man nor the animals were given the right to eat flesh. They were intended to be vegetarians (vv. 29-30). This does not mean that the “law of tooth and claw” has not prevailed from the beginning, but that it has no place in the ultimate goal of history.¹ – (*The Broadman Bible Commentary*)

VEGETATION ONLY

From Genesis 1:29 through Genesis 8, God permitted mankind to eat only plants for food. That restriction was removed after the Flood, when God gave us permission to eat all that “lives and moves” (Gen. 9:3). Many readers point to this passage as evidence that human beings were initially vegetarians. However, such an assertion cannot be inferred from the Biblical text. Whether we obeyed the “vegetarian rule” is not mentioned in the Bible, but we can only surmise that meat was eaten, since man has always disobeyed God’s commands. God has commanded us to abstain from all types of sin, including murder. That does not mean that murderers do not exist. Here are several theories that attempt to explain why God initially prohibited mankind from eating meat.

LONGER LIVES

Much has been made of the remarkably long lives of some of the early humans recorded in Genesis. Adam lived to be 930 years old, for example. Methuselah lived the longest of any person mentioned in the Bible – 969 years. Even Noah lived for 950 years. After the Flood, the

longevity of the people recorded in the Bible began to decline. This is also the time when God granted us permission to eat meat. Some have suggested that there might be a connection between the vegetarian diet and the longevity of the earliest humans. Dieticians would argue that a vegetarian diet, or a diet that minimizes the consumption of meat, is essentially healthier for human beings and may increase longevity. No one would suggest today, however, that such a diet would extend anyone's life to 900 years. Was there something special about the pre-Flood plants? The Bible does not say.

HARMONY

While animals may not attain the same lofty Biblical status as human beings, the taking of animal life – even for food – is still killing. Many scholars believe that had it not been for Adam and Eve's original sin, humans and animals would still be living together in harmony today, eating only the green plants for food. They believe that the Garden of Eden was a paradise where no animal would harm another, nor was any animal a threat to Adam or Eve. That peaceful coexistence was destroyed by sin. While it is possible that there was no killing of any kind in the special enclave called Eden, it is not clear from a reading of the text that there was perfect harmony throughout the world as many experts claim.

CONDITIONS ON THE EARTH

There is some speculation that the conditions on planet Earth before the flood were dramatically different from the conditions that followed the flood (and continuing on through today). Because of those unique conditions (which remain unknown), human consumption of animals might have been somehow detrimental to our health. Consequently, a strict vegetarian diet was required for survival. This is similar to the "Longer Lives" argument.

DO NOT KILL

The most popular argument for the vegetarian diet is that God had intended for His creations to live in peace. Some point to a passage in Isaiah to support this belief.

The wolf will live with the lamb, the leopard will lie down with the goat, the calf and the lion and the yearling together; and a little child will lead them. The cow will feed with the bear, their young will lie down together, and the lion will eat straw like the ox. The infant will play near the hole of the cobra, and the young child put his hand into the viper's nest. They will neither harm nor destroy on all my

holy mountain, for the earth will be full of the knowledge of the Lord as the waters cover the sea. – (*Isaiah 11:6-9 NIV*)

Perhaps this explanation is correct. God may have desired that all of His living creatures would coexist in peace and harmony – both humans and animals. However, it should be noted that carnivorous creatures have existed for hundreds of millions of years. If there was to be harmony among the animals, that harmony had been disrupted long before man had arrived on the scene. In addition, most Bible experts interpret Isaiah 11:6-9 as describing a future event – not something that has already happened. Harmony between man and the animals may be the intent or ultimate aspiration of God, but – for whatever reason – that state of harmony has yet to transpire.

IMPLICIT MEANINGS OF THE SIXTH DAY

I have marveled many times at the absolute brilliance of the Biblical Creation Story. It is cleverly written, and often reveals more when we read between the lines. The events of the Sixth Day are an excellent example.

God created both the Sixth Day land animals (which were mammals) and human beings on the same day. In a sense, we appear to be relegated to the same status as the other mammals. That status is superior to the plants produced on the Third Day, and it is superior to the birds, the fish, and the other animals created on the Fifth Day. Each day and each passage leads us to a higher level of creation until God declared His Holy Day of rest.

While humans and the other mammals were created on the same day, we would be considered the higher creation, since our creation was subsequent to their creation. Our position was elevated when it was revealed that we were made in the image and likeness of God. That lofty status was further accentuated when God granted us dominion over all of the creatures of the Earth.

Yet, while we are considered to be God's highest creation, it is interesting that He gave us the green plants for food – the very same food that He gave the animals. So in a sense, we were reduced to the level of the other mammals once again.

The subtleties of what is being expressed here are intriguing. We are clearly the pinnacle of all of God's creations and are meant to have dominion over the entire world. Yet, it is hard not to notice our close ties to the land mammals, which were created the same day and were given the same food to eat. This could support the belief that animals and humans were meant to live together in harmony. But it also

means that God expects us to rise above the animals and to conduct ourselves in a responsible manner, since we were given the responsibility to act as caretakers of the world.

NOTES:

1. The Broadman Bible Commentary, Vol.1 (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1973), p.125