

HOLY COW!

4th Edition

WHAT THE BIBLE SAYS ABOUT EATING MEAT

HOPE EGAN

BIBLICAL EATING PRESS

WORDS THAT FEED THE MIND BODY & SOUL

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*To God, from whom all blessings flow,
and to my husband Brian: my best friend,
faith partner and a whole lot more.*

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Preface

In 1996 I began to entertain a belief contrary to my Jewish friends and family—that Jesus is the promised Messiah.¹ What was I thinking? That Jesus is *not* the Messiah is a belief deeply entrenched in my family history. Was I really qualified to reevaluate this? How could I veer off the path my forefathers had walked for thousands of years?

After struggling with these questions for several months, I realized that the generations before me probably had not approached “the Jesus question” as intentionally as I was. I didn’t know any family members who read the Hebrew Scriptures (Old Testament) in which the Messiah is foreshadowed, let alone study the New Testament to see if Jesus fit the bill. Instead, most of them—consciously or unconsciously—inherited their rejection of Jesus from their parents, grandparents and rabbis.

A little knowledge of history reinforced their view. During the Crusades, Jews were slaughtered in Jesus’ name. During the Spanish Inquisition, “Convert to Christianity or die” was the theme. During the Reformation, Martin Luther called for believers to destroy Jewish

¹ The word “messiah” comes from the Hebrew word *moshiach*, which means “anointed one.” In the Greek, *moshiach* is translated *Christos*, which is often translated into English as “Christ.” Most Jewish folks, myself included, grow up believing that “Christ” is Jesus’ last name (or a swear word) rather than an affirmation of His messiahship. As such, I like to refer to Jesus as “Messiah” rather than “Christ.”

synagogues and religious books. Although I was ignorant of this history, my deeply ingrained rejection of Jesus was solidified by seeing TV evangelist antics and crosses burned at Ku Klux Klan rallies. These people appeared to be Jesus' most visible representatives, so I wanted nothing to do with him.

What Softened My Stance?

While recovering from a series of personal trials, I was encouraged by friends to pray for strength and wisdom. Desperate, I dabbled in prayer, and within a few days I sensed that the God of my ancestors was indeed still alive and well. Unable to ignore His existence, I set out to learn more about Him. But where to start?

It was Christians who seemed most interested in talking about God. These people focused on growing, learning and healing—with God at the center of their lives. But the thought of becoming a “Christian” seemed strange. How could I make that leap when I knew nothing about Jesus? I realized how strongly held my disbelief was, yet how little I knew. As an educated, intelligent businesswoman, I reckoned that it was time to investigate.

In spite of my (real or imagined) family opposition, I braved the journey with an open mind as best I could. Discovering information about Jesus that contradicted my core beliefs disturbed me, but I took a leap of faith and decided Jesus was for me. That choice eventually produced fruit in every area of my life—beyond my wildest expectations. Had I not ventured outside of my pre-conceived theology and my ancestors' belief system, I would have missed it.

Shortly after coming to faith in Jesus, I had my fateful lunch with Elizabeth (see the Prologue). I learned that I hadn't “converted” from Judaism to Christianity, but rather, I had become a Jewish believer in Messiah and started studying the Bible from a Hebraic perspective.

Learning about the Hebraic roots of Christianity helped me better understand the Bible and the historical context in which it was written. It also changed some of my beliefs about how to live out my faith, including what I ate.

In 2003 I wrote an 8-page paper for my friends at church. It was called “Why I Don’t Eat Pork,” and it was born out of a need to explain my new eating habits to my Christian friends. Several years later, while working as an editor for First Fruits of Zion (FFOZ), I was asked to compile the writings of D. Thomas Lancaster that related to the Bible’s food laws, especially clean and unclean meats of Leviticus 11. I thought that the book needed an introduction, so I offered to write it.

I guess I had a lot to say. The book eventually morphed into *Holy Cow!* and was first published by FFOZ in 2005. Although it was not the first book on biblical eating, it was unique in the territory it covered and how it was addressed.

In 2006 my son was born, which began my move towards more “life application” topics, like parenting, gardening, and family nutrition, and in 2009 I co-wrote the *What the Bible Says about Healthy Living Cookbook*.

Since then, my interest in biblical eating was mostly for my family’s benefit. Just getting meals on the table was an accomplishment. Between moving twice, parenting, hosting a radio show, and restarting my real estate career, advocating for biblical eating dropped off my radar. But while I was not actively spreading *Holy Cow!*’s message any more, its content was still important to me.

You want me to do what?

In 2012 my son’s Christian school was having a fundraiser and needed volunteers. I signed up to help and found myself serving pulled pork, fried clams and baked beans with ham.

To say I felt conflicted was an understatement.

On one hand, this group of teachers, parents and students were some of the kindest, most joy-filled, devoted, Bible believing followers of Jesus that I'd ever met. Did God *really* care about what they were eating?

On the other hand, I had just updated the second edition of this work and was more convinced than ever that logically, theologically and physiologically, God designed certain meats to be eaten. The stuff I was serving wasn't it.

What did God think? What did I think? What did their bodies think? I pushed aside the questions and focused on loving my neighbor.

I usually held my tongue when the topic of faith and food/health came up. In my experience, sharing my perspective about God's design for eating (especially about clean/unclean meat) was not the best way to make new friends in the land flowing with bacon and barbeque (pulled pork).

But the reality of our society's deteriorating health—especially in Christianity—haunted me. Many friends have been diagnosed with and died from cancer. Well-meaning Christians earnestly seek prayer *after* loved ones are diagnosed, but seeking wisdom about prevention, courtesy of the Creator, seemed to fall on deaf ears. Why?

The Unseen Realm

In 2018 my husband and I read *The Unseen Realm: Recovering the Supernatural Worldview of the Bible* by Dr. Michael Heiser. It opened my eyes to both the reality of spiritual warfare and the power we have as Believers—through Messiah and the Holy Spirit—to overcome and defeat the enemy. What was previously a Sunday school lesson (i.e., full armor of God costumes, songs and posters) was becoming real to me.

A short time after my eyes were opened to the unseen realm, I encountered some of the most intense personal struggles I had ever

experienced. Although I was a “Believer” in Jesus, the truth was this: over the years the enemy had deeply infiltrated my faith life, as evidenced by the fear, anger and anxiety I lived under. This wake-up call forced me into a season of repentance, healing and restoration of my faith, more committed to and focused on Jesus than I ever had been.

As the concept of spiritual warfare and the power to overcome through Jesus became more vivid, *it became clear that there are truly crafty powers and principalities that are intent on derailing believers in Messiah in any way possible.* Most of us “believe” that—but do we *live* like we believe it? We ignore that reality to our own peril.

What does this have to do with what we eat?

I believe that the church’s refusal to heed God’s call to care for our bodies is a huge asset for the enemy. Cancer, heart disease, diabetes, obesity, and chronic fatigue all help Satan’s cause. The fewer, healthier Christians in the world, the fewer voices for the Lord. By tempting us away from God’s ingredients, he lures us towards foods that weaken our bodies and therefore our ability to fight for the Gospel. Echoes of Eden plague us: “Did God really say not to eat...?”

Getting Back in the Game

After many years of ruminating on all of this, I was ready to advocate for biblical eating again, but I had no opportunity. Sitting on the sidelines had become uncomfortable.

In March, 2020 Barry Rubin called and wanted to enlist me and *Holy Cow!* to battle against Covid-19. Huh? What did *Holy Cow!* have to do with the corona virus?

Barry and his wife held to the belief that unclean meat may have been the source of the pandemic. They sent me several scientific articles that appeared to link bats (which are unclean) to this global catastrophe. I wasn’t convinced, since there were other theories that seemed more likely.

I don't think eating bats is healthy or God's design, but I wasn't comfortable linking them so directly. But I was excited to freshen up *Holy Cow!* and release it with a new publisher, so we released *Holy Cow! Does God Really Care about What We Eat?*

What the Bible Says about Eating Meat

Fast forward to 2024. For the last several years I have had the privilege of periodically helping Annette Reeder with her biblical wellness ministry. In the process, I've witnessed how frequently meat-related Bible questions come up for folks pursuing God's design for healthy living. I've also recognized—in the swirl of daily family, real estate and homestead life—that God has planted a passion within me to share this part of the biblical eating puzzle with anyone seeking it. However, because this work's previous title (*Holy Cow! Does God Care about What We Eat?*) gave many the impression that it was a diet / health book, I realized that it was time to clarify what it's about: what the Bible says about eating meat. Hence the name change and my desire to publish it with Biblical Eating Press, my new publishing company.

If you are a believer in Jesus, I pray that this book encourages and motivates you to seek God's design for your food choices. If you are not yet a believer, I invite you to explore the claims of Jesus. Regardless of your background and beliefs, I invite you “sit in the tension” and open-handedly explore interpretations radically different than what you've believed in the past.

Part I

Hope's Perspective

Prologue

Lunch with a Nice Jewish Girl

“**D**oes the split pea soup have ham in it?” Elizabeth asked the waiter. After he answered and took our order, I asked her, “Are you a vegetarian?”

“No,” she casually said, “I’m just trying to keep *kosher*.”

“*Kosher*?” I asked her. “You mean you have two sets of dishes? And you don’t eat milk and meat together?”

“No,” Elizabeth answered, “I don’t keep traditions that require two sets of silverware and dishes; those aren’t in the Bible. I focus on the biblical ones, like not eating pork or shellfish. Leviticus 11 spells out pretty clearly which foods God created to be eaten and which ones He didn’t. I don’t believe that He changes His mind, so I try to follow His guidelines.”

“Hmmm....”

I first met Elizabeth at our church’s book club. I was excited to have lunch with her, since her wisdom and passion about the Bible were apparent, and since, like me, she was a Jewish believer in Jesus. The concept of avoiding pork and shellfish, however, seemed peculiar. At this point I had been a follower of Jesus for several years and never considered that any faith-based eating guidelines might apply to me. I was under the distinct impression that God did not care about what we ate.

Dietary Law Confusion

From my childhood I knew that observant Jews didn't eat pork or shellfish. They avoid eating dairy and meat together, and they don't eat meat-based foods on dishes used for dairy foods (and vice versa). I was open to anything God wanted for me, but did He really care whether I ate today's beef chili in yesterday's cereal bowl? Before making any radical changes for God, I would need to believe that it was truly His will and in line with His Word. From my reading, the meat/dairy separation currently practiced in observant Jewish homes was not found in the Bible.

While Elizabeth's perspective on "keeping *kosher*" was much simpler than mine, it was still odd. After all, I'd never heard any Christians even mention abstaining from pork. I certainly didn't abstain. Ribs were my favorite meal and my choice for my annual birthday dinner. Besides, wasn't ham a traditional Christian holiday food? If faithful Christians celebrated Jesus' birth and resurrection with pork, I figured they must have carefully weighed this decision—especially since the Hebrew Scriptures (Old Testament) contains explicit prohibitions against it.¹

Yet Elizabeth's avoidance of pork intrigued me.

Is the Bible Reliable?

My lunch with Liz raised an issue that had troubled me for several years. I had often wondered, "How can I rely on the New Testament to learn about Jesus, when it sometimes seemed to contradict my ancestors' Scriptures?"²

Five years earlier I had joined a small Christian faith community in which I learned about Jesus and the Bible—two things I knew very little about. I eventually committed my life to Jesus, but my journey was filled

¹ Leviticus 11:7 and Deuteronomy 14:8

² I share how I have begun to reconcile these apparent contradictions in chapter four.

with confusion. Why did Jesus have to die? What's the atonement? Is Satan real?

Whenever I asked questions, my friends always turned to the Bible as the ultimate information source. Their reverence for this book seemed extreme, but their wise ways of dealing with life's toughest issues hooked me. Since the Bible was the foundation for that wisdom, I was compelled to read it.

My first reaction to the Christian Bible was shock: I had no idea that over two-thirds of it was identical to the Jewish Bible. How could Christianity share such a large chunk of its Scriptures with Judaism, yet the two religions seem so different?

I started at the beginning. As I read, I rediscovered characters from my brief religious education: Adam and Eve, Noah, Joseph and other familiar heroes. My Bible was coming alive with the same stories that I had glossed over as a child.

Leaning heavily on my footnotes, I read about vaguely familiar people and events with both joy and confusion. Growing up, I didn't really believe in God, yet our family observed Passover much like Exodus 12 directs. I was excited to see the ancient roots of my family's tradition, but why didn't my new Bible friends even mention Passover? As I continued to read, the questions continued to surface. Deuteronomy 6:9 commands us to mark the doorposts of our houses with God's Word to remind us of Him. Again, this is something we did growing up; why is it totally absent in Christianity? Leviticus 11 plainly forbids us to eat pork:

These are the creatures which you may eat from all the animals that are on the earth. ³ Whatever divides a hoof, thus making split hoofs, *and* chews the cud, among the animals, that you may eat...the pig, for though it divides the hoof, thus making a split hoof, it does not chew cud,

it is unclean to you. ⁸You shall not eat of their flesh...
(Leviticus 11:2-3, 7-8)

So why did most Bible-believing Christians eat it?

Sadly, I didn't really care about Jewish faith observances, since they felt empty to me growing up. I was, however, confused. I needed to understand why some commands in the Hebrew Scriptures seemed to be ignored by Believers if I was going to take the Bible and Jesus seriously. I yearned for a worldview that made sense, but being urged to believe in the truth of the whole Bible—while disregarding emphatic parts of it—literally made me queasy.

When I asked why we omitted certain Bible passages from our daily lives, my Christian friends gave me confident, authoritative answers like, “Jesus fulfilled the Law,” and “We are no longer under Law; we're under grace.” Still perplexed, I assumed that my young faith kept me from understanding their answers and trusted that concepts I didn't fully grasp would become clear later. After all, I wasn't stupid.

I graduated from college with highest honors, passed the CPA exam on my first try, and counseled senior executives on how to plan for their financial futures. I gave up trying to reconcile the apparent contradictions and committed to “sit in the tension,” knowing that God would eventually put the pieces together for me. I continued on my Christian journey, eating my special rib dinners and leaving the doctrinal issues to the theologians.

I thought I had let go of the whole contradiction issue, but after my lunch with Elizabeth, my questions reappeared. In addition, I realized that my last few rib dinners had grossed me out, and that I no longer enjoyed the shrimp and scallop meals that I'd occasionally cook. Was this the power of suggestion, or was the Holy Spirit moving and convicting me?

God's Design for Healthy Eating

At this point in my life, I was NOT looking to eliminate anything from my diet. For both physical and emotional health reasons I'd already spent many years striving to clean up my eating habits, and—only by God's grace—had been reasonably successful. In fact, it was only through my assorted food struggles that I realized how much I needed God and His power in my life. I couldn't have changed my diet without Him and His empowering Spirit.

Now, just when I finally felt at peace about how I was eating, and my physical and emotional health were stable, God showed me something else to let go of: ribs, one of my few lingering food indulgences. Oy!

Committed to doing God's will in all areas of my life, I took the plunge and gave up pork and shellfish. Since the other areas that I'd submitted to Him (like money and work) had usually turned out well, I trusted that the pork thing would too. Because of my skepticism, however, I needed to understand it—both biblically and scientifically.

A book by Dr. Gordon Tessler, a Christian nutrition expert, gave me a new perspective. His book, *The Genesis Diet*, began to help me see that God might very well care about what I ate. How? By illuminating God's design for eating, which includes both plant and meat-based foods, but which excludes pork and shellfish. More importantly, *The Genesis Diet* challenged some common theology used to explain why the Hebrew Scriptures' instructions no longer apply. My brain-fog began to clear as I found answers to some of my most vexing questions. Besides learning about God's design for eating, I also started learning how to use the Bible to interpret the Bible.

Rejuvenated Faith

Until that point, I focused on listening to my teachers, studying commentaries, and reading footnotes rather than reading the Word itself. This gave me a better understanding of the Bible's ancient Near Eastern setting. I knew that context was crucial for understanding the Bible, but until this season, I hadn't found resources to help me.

I began to read magazines and books focused on the Hebraic roots of Christianity. These writers unpacked the Scriptures, using mainly the Bible itself, ancient texts and their knowledge of the original Greek and Hebrew. I always knew that Jesus was Jewish. Now I began to understand the holidays He celebrated, the foods He ate and the culture He lived in—and how these things applied to me. My two-dimensional faith was becoming three-dimensional!

I soon discovered that there is a growing movement of mainstream Christians who believe that the Hebrew Scriptures' instructions apply to them as a natural response to their relationship with God—not as a prerequisite. They believe that Jesus is the Messiah, and that we are saved by grace, through faith (Ephesians 2:8). However, they also believe that Jesus “fulfilled the Law” by giving the Hebrew Scriptures its fullest meaning, by interpreting it properly, and by fully living it out.³

Excited to reconcile some of my biggest faith questions, and finally feeling like I had found a theological home, I shared this information with my non-Jewish husband, Brian. He was understandably skeptical.

“You mean you want to get two sets of dishes?”

Unfortunately, when he asked this question, I was not as grounded as Elizabeth had been with me. My feeble responses caused him to quote a flurry of Bible verses to prove that our current food choices were

³ Traditional interpretation generally holds that because He “fulfilled the Law” we need not follow it. This is discussed further in chapter four.

perfectly in line with Scripture: “One person has faith that he may eat all things, but he who is weak eats vegetables only...each person must be fully convinced in his own mind” (Romans 14:2, 5). “For everything created by God is good, and nothing is to be rejected if it is received with gratitude; for it is sanctified by means of the word of God and prayer” (1 Timothy 4:4-5) and “Eat anything that is sold in the meat market without asking questions for conscience’ sake...” (1 Corinthians 10:25).

Not knowing how to respond, I wept, and the tension between us grew. The more I tried to convince him that examining the historical context and original languages shed new light on this topic, the more verses he quoted, and the more convinced he became that I was wrong. At one point he told me, “Languages-schmanguages! It’s pretty clear to me that it doesn’t matter what we eat!”

God had been the glue that bound us together, but now it felt like our different interpretations of His Word were driving a wedge between us. We tried to ignore the issue, but I felt estranged from him. Distaught, I completely lost my appetite and struggled to eat, a rare occurrence for me.

Trying to explain my new perspective was not working, so I tried a subtler approach. I left my Hebraic roots magazines lying around, hoping he would read one. It was inconceivable to Brian that this magazine, covered in Hebrew letters, could have anything to do with the Bible or Jesus. In fact, it filled him with dread. He wondered, “Where is she going with all this? Is she going to become Orthodox? She’s gone off the deep end—in a bad way.”

Brian’s antennae about my new studies went up quickly. He associated teachings that looked “Jewish” with the rejection of Jesus. While certainly not anti-Semitic (his appreciation for my heritage was clear from the day we met), he did fear that my current path was the first step towards abandoning Messiah. Since I had flirted with Orthodox

Judaism earlier in my faith walk, his concerns were valid. There is no room in Orthodox Judaism for the messiahship of Jesus.

My husband had a passion for discerning truth from error, so he was very leery of anything not accepted by mainstream Christianity. He often listened to Bible teaching on the radio, and he was committed to using only trustworthy sources to help him understand God's Word.

To investigate the perceived error that I had slipped into, Brian picked up my latest magazine within a few weeks. The opening article affirmed how central Messiah is to our walk. The Passover-related articles pointed to Messiah. Finally, a featured article addressed the meat-related food laws of Leviticus 11 and many of Brian's original concerns.

After reading this article and researching the topic himself, he also became convinced that the Bible's instructions about God's design for meat still applied to us. Concerned about why this new conclusion was so different from what he had always been taught, my heresy-hunting husband joined my path, and together we began our journey to reconcile the Old and New Testaments and their applicability to our lives. The foundation of faith on which we had originally built our marriage was not only restored, it grew stronger with our new perspective!

Join My Journey

Meanwhile, I continued to investigate God's design for healthy eating, which extends far beyond the issue of meat. Urged by others to share what I was learning, I spoke about biblical eating at our church's women's ministry events and met Amy, who shared my passion for God and all of His intelligently designed foods. Together we started a monthly cooking club, spoke at local churches' women's events, and wrote a cookbook.⁴

⁴ *The What the Bible Says about Healthy Living Cookbook: Simple and Tasty Recipes Featuring God's Ingredients.*

During this time I dialogued with many women and heard their questions. Some of these women shared my earlier confusion about pork and shellfish; others were blessed to find peace and clarity with traditional explanations. These conversations, in part, have inspired me to write this book.

To be clear: *God's perspective on food is not the core of my faith; it is merely a single facet. Without whole-hearted devotion to God, through Jesus, by the Holy Spirit, the journey of food and faith can be soul crushing and legalistic. I know from experience.* The goal of this book is to share information about biblical eating—not as a way to gain right-standing before God.

Holy Cow! is not about doing something (or avoiding something) so that we can have a relationship with Him or be “saved.” Rather, exploring what the Bible says about what we eat is a response to our faith. It arises naturally from our belief that our Creator loves us and has carefully designed our bodies and our food supply. *Because* we already have a relationship with Him, we respond to His love for us by seeking His will and wisdom in all areas of life—including what we eat. As redeemed people, we bear the most fruit when we submit our whole selves to our Creator. In other words, dietary and health issues are not the core of my faith, but they are the main focus of this book.

Neither a theological treatise nor a diet manual, *Holy Cow!* is simply what I, a layperson, have learned as I have attempted to discern God's instructions for eating.⁵ You may or may not agree with my conclusions, but I pray that this investigation enriches your understanding of the Bible and that you find great joy in the process!

⁵ See Part II, *Holy Cow! There's More!* written by Bible teacher D. Thomas Lancaster, for deeper and more theological explanations of my Part I material.

Questions to prayerfully ponder and discuss

Use the questions at the end of each chapter to prayerfully seek God’s wisdom and perspective as you examine your own thoughts, feelings and beliefs. As you respectfully dialogue with others, remember that everyone is coming from different upbringings, experiences and worldviews—even if you are part of the same congregation!

1. What beliefs about Jesus have you inherited from your family, your religious educators or society? Which have you researched on your own? What, exactly, has that research involved?
2. What beliefs about eating pork and shellfish have you inherited from your family, your religious educators or society? Which have you researched on your own? What has that research involved?
3. What do you hope to learn from this book?
4. What do you understand the term “keeping *kosher*” to mean?
5. Does God factor into any of your food choices? If so, how did you arrive at your conclusions?

1

In the Beginning

Food and the Hebrew Scriptures

In the churches I have attended, “fellowship” is often synonymous with “eating,” but I have rarely heard the topic of food addressed from the pulpit. When I hear it discussed, teachers make it clear that God does not care about what we eat. They cite verses like Matthew 6:25, where Jesus tells His disciples not to worry about what to eat or drink. But is that possible? Could God really not have an opinion about an activity that every human being must do several times a day? Does the Bible address every aspect of life, including birth, death, marriage, sex, work and money, but forget this one?

I am convinced that God has a detailed plan for how we fuel our bodies. The psalmist seems to agree:

He makes grass grow for the cattle, and plants for man to cultivate—bringing forth food from the earth...

The lions roar for their prey and seek their food from God. These all look to you to give them their food at the proper time.

When you give it to them, they gather it up; when you open your hand, they are satisfied with good things.

(Psalm 104:14, 21, 27-28)

If God is so thoughtful with the animals' food provisions, how much more so does He provide for us?

In the Beginning

Let's start at the beginning. Genesis chapter one gives us our first peek at God's design for what we eat. On the sixth day, after God created man and commanded him to be fruitful and multiply, our Creator addressed one of our most basic needs: food.

Then God said, "Behold, I have given you every plant yielding seed that is on the surface of all the earth, and every tree which has fruit yielding seed; it shall be food for you." (Genesis 1:29)

What do we learn from this simple verse?

Just as God deliberately created the sun, moon, stars, seas, plants, animals and humans, He also intentionally designed what we would eat. From the beginning of time, fruits, vegetables, grains, beans, nuts and seeds were God's healthy staples for mankind. Because He cares for us and our nutritional needs, our loving Creator specifically designed food for us.

Examining seed-bearing plants reveals how well-devised God's plant-based foods are:

Seeds seem almost too good to be true...A scientific examination of seeds indicates that they could not have developed by random chance. Their unique qualities

point to the fact that they were designed by a benevolent Creator.¹

Dr. Rex Russell (a Christian medical doctor) goes on to explain how seeds grow everywhere in the world, in any climate, and reproduce quickly. They have a long storage life: Kernels found in Egyptian tombs can still be sprouted after 4,000 years. Nutritionally—if they are not processed or refined—these intelligently designed seeds meet nearly all of our nutritional needs, since they are filled with vitamins, minerals, fiber and even protein.

Here is another example. Most folks have heard that taking small amounts of aspirin helps prevent heart problems. The downside to taking aspirin, however, is that by ingesting it in medicinal form, it actually increases the risk of other problems, such as hemorrhagic strokes. God's perfect Genesis 1:29 food, on the other hand, is a win-win for the body:

Apparently produce such as fruits and vegetables has just the right amount of aspirin to prevent both kinds of strokes—unnecessary clotting [which leads to heart attacks] and hemorrhagic strokes. Just three vegetables a day decreases the incidence of strokes and heart attacks by a significant amount.²

The myriad of disease-fighting, health-promoting foods found in Genesis 1:29 illustrates how God created our food using great detail.

In discerning God's plan for eating, some Christian vegetarians and vegans start and end with Genesis 1:29. (Vegetarians eat eggs and dairy products, while avoiding red meat, chicken and fish; vegans avoid all animal products.) To their credit, Genesis 1:29 foods are packed with

¹ Russell, Rex, MD *What the Bible Says about Healthy Living*. Regal, 1996, p. 105.

² Russell, p. 46

life-giving nutrients that most people would do well to eat more of, especially since Genesis 2:9 repeats God's initial food design for mankind: "Out of the ground the LORD God caused to grow every tree that is pleasing to the sight and good for food." Several millennia later, the prophet Daniel's plant-based diet brought good results. After insisting on eating nothing but vegetables for ten days, he and his buddies appeared "better ... than all the youths who had been eating the king's choice food." (Daniel 1:15) Clearly, Genesis 1:29 foods lead to excellent health.

Noah

While plants contain more protein than most folks realize, Genesis 1:29 foods do lack some nutrients found only in animals and animal products.³ Not surprisingly, we see meat enter mankind's diet a few chapters later in the account of Noah.

Most people have heard about Noah and the great flood. To prepare for the downpour, Noah took only two of each animal onto the ark with him, right? Wrong. God actually tells Noah:

You shall take with you of every clean animal by sevens, a male and his female; and of the animals that are not clean two, a male and his female. (Genesis 7:2)

While God did tell Noah to take one pair of each unclean animal, Noah was told to collect *seven* pairs of the clean ones.

What can we discern from this? The distinction between clean and unclean animals appeared long before the Jewish people or the laws of the Covenant. In fact, since the flood occurred around 700-800 years

³ See *The Treasures of Healthy Living Bible Study* (Reeder) and *The Maker's Diet* (Rubin) for information about the myth that we can meet 100% of our nutritional needs without any animal products. This topic is also extensively addressed in *Nourishing Traditions* (Fallon).

before the giving of the Law at Mount Sinai, the distinction between clean and unclean animals seems to have universal application. It is not just a Jewish thing. In both Jewish and Christian faith traditions, Noah (like Adam) represents all of mankind. In other words, the difference between clean and unclean animals seems relevant for everyone—non-Jewish and Jewish people alike.

Let's ponder this.

First, how did Noah distinguish between clean and unclean animals? The relevant laws (Leviticus 11) had not yet been given. But if he was to gather seven pairs of clean animals and only one pair of unclean, he must have known the difference. Perhaps since “Noah walked with God,” (Genesis 6:9) additional, unrecorded conversations between them took place where God explained the distinctions. Or maybe (as some Jewish traditions hold) this knowledge was passed down from Adam, who named the animals and might have had this information.

Here is another question: Why did God require Noah to take seven pairs of clean animals but only one pair of unclean animals? Looking at post-flood events gives us some clues.

After the flood, Noah eventually steps back onto dry ground. Just as God did with Adam in Genesis one, He commands Noah to populate the earth (Genesis 9:1). Just as with Adam, God then issues a new food-related directive:

Every moving thing that is alive shall be food for you; I give all to you, as I gave the green plant. (Genesis 9:3)

God alludes to His earlier plant-based food plan (the green plant) and now provides man with animal sources of food. Let the meat eating begin! With the earth completely destroyed, it was probably helpful to have this non-plant food source while the plants grew back.

But what did God mean by “every moving thing that is alive ...”? Was this open-season on every type of living creature, including skunks, rats and snakes? Probably not. More likely, Noah abstained from eating these and other animals that God classifies as unclean. (We will learn about clean and unclean meat later in this chapter.)

Think about it.

Barely out of the gate of biblical history, we saw God give Adam “every seed-bearing plant on the face of the earth” for food (Genesis 1:29). But we know that “every” plant did not really mean “all” plants. After all, some plants are toxic and therefore not fit for consumption. Also, in Genesis 2:16-17 God limits what Adam could eat, telling him not to eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. In spite of language that seems all-inclusive, these food restrictions illustrate how the verse granting permission for Noah to eat “every moving thing” does not necessarily mean that he had license to eat “all moving things.”

What would happen if Noah, in a fit of hunger, spit-roasted a pig shortly after the Genesis 9:3 pronouncement? As we will see, pigs are unclean, so Noah sheltered only two of them from the flood. Therefore, eating one would have meant immediate extinction for the entire species. Similarly, in Genesis 8:20, Noah’s first sacrifice included “every clean animal” and “every clean bird.” Had Noah offered up a dog (which is unclean), man’s best friend would have immediately disappeared from the earth.⁴ Since Scripture tells us that Noah sacrificed only clean animals, he probably ate only clean ones, in spite of being given “every moving thing” to eat. The New Living Translation seems to agree. Its paraphrase of Genesis 7:2 instructs Noah to “take along seven pairs of each animal *that I have approved for eating* and for sacrifice ...” (emphasis

⁴ Technically, their time on the ark might have allowed unclean animals to reproduce. Because of the original numbers chosen, however, I still think that the plan was to avoid eating and sacrificing unclean animals.

mine). Somehow Noah knew the difference and avoided eating and sacrificing the unclean ones.

Meat Eating after Noah

Several centuries after Noah, another universal figure of faith is introduced: Abraham. Throughout the book of Genesis, Abraham and his offspring are frequently seen tending to their herds and flocks.⁵ In the Hebrew Scriptures, the Hebrew word translated as “herds” always refers to cows,⁶ while the word for “flocks” generally refers to sheep, goats and lambs.⁷ As we will soon see, the Hebrew Scriptures classify these animals as clean. At one point (Genesis 18) we see Abraham serve a choice calf to his heavenly guests.

Eventually Abraham begets Isaac, who begets Jacob (also named Israel), whose 12 sons become the 12 Tribes of Israel. Joseph (one of Jacob’s sons) rises to fame in Egypt, where he eventually relocates his entire family. After a short-lived era of prosperity, Jacob’s descendants become enslaved to the Egyptians for over 400 years.

God eventually delivers the Children of Israel from Egyptian bondage. In addition to Jacob’s blood relatives, however, non-Hebrews (a “mixed multitude”) and clean animals join the escape from Egypt and the journey to Mount Sinai:

Now the sons of Israel journeyed from Rameses to Succoth, about six-hundred thousand men on foot, aside from children. A mixed multitude also went up with

⁵ For example, see Genesis 13:5; 24:35; 26:14; 29:2-3, 8.

⁶ Strong’s H1241

⁷ Strong’s H6629

them, along with flocks and herds, a very large number of livestock. (Exodus 12:37-38)

Several weeks after the Exodus, God joins Israel in a covenant relationship at Mount Sinai. Having been redeemed from slavery, the Israelites are now blessed with godly instructions for living: God's Law, *Torah* in Hebrew.

What, Exactly, is the Torah?

The food laws related to meat are found in a part of the Bible called the *Torah*, the first five books of the Bible: Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy. It is commonly referred to as the *Pentateuch* (based on the Greek work for the number five) or the Five Books of Moses, since Moses is considered the writer of these books. These writings include historical narratives, important genealogies, prophecies, beautiful poetry and God's laws for living. The rest of Scripture—both Old and New Testaments—is built on the Torah's foundation. It was the first piece of our Bible. For centuries, it *was* the whole Bible.

The Hebrew word *Torah* is better translated “instruction” than “law.” The Rabbis often point out that if the Torah were merely the law of the Jewish people, it would not start with Genesis, which includes the story of Adam and Eve, the story of Noah and the story of the patriarchs. The natural conclusion? The Torah is much more than a legal code, and it applies to all of mankind—not just the Jewish people.

In the Hebrew Scriptures, God encouraged Joshua to meditate on and follow the Torah day and night;⁸ the prophets called wayward Israel back to the Torah;⁹ and David spoke passionately about reading and

⁸ Joshua 1:8

⁹ For example, see Jeremiah 26:4-5.