

God's Food Laws

Scripture reveals that God created the vast array of animal life that inhabits our planet and further states that some animals were created for the specific purpose of providing food for mankind **1 Timothy 4:3**. Although a Christian is not obligated to eat any meats, vegetarianism in its various forms, if practiced as a matter of religious requirement, is considered to be a spiritual weakness **Romans 14:2**.

The book of Genesis can be described as a book of beginnings. This book was written by Moses to provide a historical record of what took place, not as a book of laws. Readers should not assume that the law has not been in existence from the beginning.

The first statement in Scripture concerning "clean" and "unclean" animals is found in **Genesis 7:2**, where Noah is commanded to take seven (or seven pairs of) clean animals and only one pair of unclean animals. When God told Noah to build a giant ark, He gave explicit instructions on its size, composition and design, yet God saw no need to instruct Noah about which creatures were clean and which were unclean. God's instruction and Noah's response clearly indicate that Noah understood which creatures were clean and which were not.

At the conclusion of the great flood, God told Noah: "Every moving thing that lives shall be food for you. I have given you all things, even as the green herbs" **Genesis 9:3**. The point being made in the preceding verse is that, even though there were few men left alive, and large and dangerous animals had been preserved, Noah and his family had no need to fear these animals.

Verse 3 shows that the animals were to be for man's benefit. They were given into man's control in the same way the green plants were given. Some green plants are suitable for food, some are suitable for building materials, some are for beautification and enjoyment, and some are poisonous and can sicken and bring death when ingested. In the same way, some animals are useful for providing food, while others provide fibers for clothing, strength for working the land or protection from dangers.

Whenever animals are mentioned in Scripture as a food source or in connection with sacrifice before Mount Sinai, they are invariably clean animals **Genesis 15:9**—cow, goat, sheep, dove and pigeon; **Genesis 22:13**—sheep; **Exodus 12:5**—sheep or goat). The law of clean and unclean meats clearly predates the Old Covenant, regardless of

what role they may have played within that covenant.

When the Levitical system was established, it was necessary to codify a number of matters that had already been in effect for some time. Two passages of Scripture, **Leviticus 11:1-47** and **Deuteronomy 14:3-21**, make clear which creatures are set apart as suitable for food and which are not, though these passages merely codify practices that long predated the Levitical system. The term used to designate those animals whose flesh is acceptable for food is clean, while the term used for those that are not suitable for food is unclean.

Scripture does not reveal exactly why God designated certain animal flesh as suitable for food while other flesh was not acceptable. Whatever the reasons, God knows why and how He created each animal, and He designates certain substances as good for food and others as unacceptable.

Various passages in the New Testament indicate that the laws of clean and unclean meats were still being observed by Jesus Christ and His followers. As eager as the religious leaders were to accuse Jesus of violating their interpretations of religious law, there is no record that they ever confronted Him about His teachings or practices on this matter. Had He advocated eating unclean meats, it would have been an ideal way to defame His reputation with the masses, since they would have been appalled at such an idea. Jesus' words in the oft-misquoted passage in Mark 7 would have outraged the religious leaders, had they interpreted His statement the way many people try to explain it today. The use of Mark 7 as a basis for eating unclean meats is founded on a different use of grammar that is found in only a few of the Greek manuscripts.

Acts 10 illustrates the understanding about clean and unclean meats, although this is not the primary purpose behind the vision. Peter received a vision from God that instructed him to take the gospel message to the nations and peoples outside the Jewish community. During this vision, Peter three times refused to partake of the unclean animals shown him and remained puzzled about the meaning of the vision until God revealed that it was about people and not about clean and unclean animals. It was revealed to Peter that no man should be considered "common or unclean" (verses 28-29).

This chapter ends with the Holy Spirit being given to the household of Cornelius as proof that the gospel was now going to all nations (verses 44-48). Although this section of Scripture has been used as permission to eat unclean animals, it clearly indicates the

opposite. This event took place several years into the history of the New Testament Church, yet Peter rejected the idea of eating unclean meat, even going so far as protesting that he had "never eaten anything that is common or unclean" (verse 14).

Paul wrote of creatures "which God created to be received with thanksgiving by those who believe and know the truth" and described these creatures as "sanctified by the word of God and prayer" **1 Timothy 4:3, 5**. The word used to describe these creatures, sanctified, carries the dual connotation of being set apart from something as well as being set apart for something. The clean animals are those that have clearly been set apart by the Word of God from all other animals and can be used for man's nourishment. The flesh of those creatures that are designated as suitable for food is to be received thankfully by those who believe and know the truth.

Benefits of a healthy diet

Other than simply keeping us alive, what benefits should a healthy diet provide?

Perhaps most important, it should fortify our immune system and help protect us against disease. It is common knowledge that a proper diet lowers our risk for many diseases.

It should also enable us to avoid the troublesome weight problems that plague the Western world. "Half of all adults in Europe and 61 percent of Americans are overweight" (University of California, Berkeley, Wellness Letter, November 2001).

The situation is serious enough that the surgeon general of the United States "has declared obesity a national epidemic, and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention says it's fast replacing smoking as public health enemy No. 1" (*U.S. News & World Report*, July 1). This statement illustrates the magnitude of the risk of being overweight, considering that an estimated 500,000 Americans die annually from tobacco-related diseases.

What are the biblical laws that, if obeyed, would promote good health and combat disease?

Avoid meats the Bible calls "unclean"

The Bible declares some kinds of meat, including pork and shellfish, to be "unclean,"

meaning they are not meant to be consumed as food **Leviticus 11:4-44**. Many don't realize that the dietary laws God gave in this regard still apply. Indeed, it appears likely that God gave these laws because the proscribed meat is simply bad for us, unfit for human consumption.

A common false assumption is that God meant His dietary laws only for ancient Israel that they constituted part of the Old Covenant and were abolished under the New.

Actually, however, the Bible records commands that make the distinction between clean and unclean animals that predates God's covenant with Israel by nearly 1,000 years, as **Genesis 7:2** records, God instructed Noah to take onto the ark seven pairs of clean animals and one pair of unclean. When God instructed Noah, Noah didn't need to ask God which were clean or unclean because he already knew. Indeed, it seems probable that when God created the animals in Genesis 1 He designated them either clean or unclean from that time forward.

Eat a balanced diet of clean meats

God created certain meats for human consumption **Leviticus 11:2**. Red meat such as lamb or beef is high in nutritional value and beneficial for health. But the biblical example is to eat red meat sparingly; often it was served only at feasts or other special occasions.

If you need to reduce your red-meat consumption, you can supplement your diet with more fowl and fish. "During the time of Jesus ... domestic fowl such as chickens, geese, pigeons, partridges, duck and quail were consumed".

"On the shores of the Sea of Galilee, fish was a common article of food in the days of Jesus". Several of Jesus' disciples were former fishermen, and Jesus Himself ate fish **Luke 24:42**.

Current research demonstrates that fish and fowl are especially healthy foods. The Wellness Encyclopedia notes that "a small portion (three to four ounces of cooked poultry without bones or skin) provides about half the daily adult protein requirement and has half to one-third the calories and fat of a similar portion of steak. Poultry is also a good source of B vitamins."

It adds: "Like meat and poultry, fish is an excellent source of protein, relatively low in calories, fat and cholesterol . Fish also supply certain vitamins Moreover, fish fat contains a special group of polyunsaturated fatty acids known as omega-3s. Research has shown that omega-3s can protect against heart disease".

Don't eat animal fat or blood

The Bible tells us not to consume animal fat and blood **Leviticus 3:17**. Scientists now realize that a direct cause-and-effect relationship exists between excess consumption of fat and heart disease. "Over 53 percent of people in large industrialized countries die of heart disease. Heart disease is most commonly caused by fat deposits that build up in the arteries, often beginning in the teenage years".

But that is not the only hazard associated with eating animal fat. Toxins also tend to concentrate in an animal's fat. While most of the fat in lean, range-fattened clean animals is isolated from the meat and easily trimmed away, "the toxins in pork are held especially in the fat, which is not isolated from the meat as can be the case in lean beef, but rather, it is dispersed throughout the meat."

There are also important reasons to abstain from blood. "Scientists have long known that blood carries infections and toxins that circulate in an animal's body. If people eat animal blood, they are needlessly exposed to these infections and toxins."

Limit fat consumption

Our bodies require some fat to be healthy. Nutritionists generally recommend that we ingest no more than 30 percent of our calories from fat. Some sources of fat are healthier than others. The best sources include fish and unsaturated plant-based fat. Fat from olives is among the healthiest plant-based fats. God supplied His people with this in abundance in that He placed them in a "land of olive oil" **Deuteronomy 8:8**.

A modern example that indicates olive oil is healthy for food is the dietary habits of the inhabitants of the Greek island of Crete. "Residents of Crete consume more olive oil per person than any other nation ... In a fifteen-year period, 38 out of 10,000 Cretans died of heart disease, as compared to 773 out of 10,000 Americans."

To realize the maximum benefits from consuming olive oil, it should be "extra virgin or

virgin olive oil. If a bottle of olive oil is not labeled 'extra virgin' or 'virgin,' then the oil has been refined in some way.”

Oils that are beneficial also include canola, safflower and sunflower. Nutritionists frequently exhort us to raise our HDL (high-density lipoprotein) cholesterol, the "good" kind. "If raising your HDL is a primary concern, you should replace saturated fats found in meats, whole milk, and cheese, as well as coconut oil with either polyunsaturated fats as in sunflower and safflower oil, or, even better, monounsaturated fats as in olive and canola oil. This will lower both total cholesterol and LDL [low-density lipoprotein], and maintain HDL or boost it slightly.”

Be aware that many commercially sold oils are subjected to a hydrogenation process before marketing. When the oils are hydrogenated, their beneficial effects are largely nullified. "Depending on the degree of hydrogenation, these artificially saturated vegetable fats are no better for you than comparably saturated animal fats". Because baked products sold in stores generally contain hydrogenated fats, they should be consumed in moderation.

Are the fats in dairy products healthy for us? They constituted part of the biblical diet **Genesis 18:8; 1 Samuel 17:18** and are beneficial if eaten sparingly. Butter, in moderation, is an acceptable source of fat. Heart patients who ate margarine had twice as many heart attacks as those who ate butter.”

Cheese is high in protein and loaded with calcium but contains a lot of fat. It can be safely consumed in moderation, though many overdo it. "Cheese is the leading source of artery clogging fat in the U.S. diet, according to a report from the Center for Science in the Public Interest. The average American is eating three times as much cheese today as 30 years ago on pizza, pasta, burgers, sandwiches, and even salads" (Wellness Letter, May 2001).

Eat whole grains

Bread, made from wheat, barley or millet, was the staple diet item in Bible times. "Bread was of such importance that the expression 'eat bread and drink water' could be used to signify eating and drinking as a whole".

The importance of bread in the biblical diet is illustrated by Jesus when He said He was the bread of life **John 6:35, 48**. Just as Christ is essential for salvation **Acts 4:12**, whole-grain products are essential to healthy eating.

"Eat six or more servings of grains or legumes, daily. Whole grains are especially nutritious. These foods will help you obtain the 20 to 30 grams of dietary fiber you need each day and will provide most of the important vitamins and minerals.

One caution, however, concerns hybrid grains. Many of today's hybrids, including wheat, contain a greatly reduced percentage of protein and an excessive percentage of carbohydrates compared with the non hybrid grains in use during the biblical era. Non hybrid grains tend to be far more nutritionally balanced than are most hybrid grains.

Grain products also typically undergo major changes in their journey from the field to the grocer's shelf. For example, wheat is generally processed into white flour. The result? "Both the bran and the germ have been removed, along with approximately 80 percent of the wheat's nutrients". What about commercially produced breakfast cereals? They "usually have more than 50 percent of their calories in sugar and very little to no fiber".

The average Western diet lacks adequate fiber. "Though not a source of calories, vitamins or minerals, it contributes to health in several ways and deficiency of it in the ordinary diet is a significant nutritional problem in our societies".

A biblical dietary comparison

Fruits and vegetables, along with whole grains, constituted the bulk of the biblical diet. "Everywhere the Hebrew people traveled, they included vegetables in their diet". The vegetables included leeks, onions, garlic and cucumbers.

"The various fruits mentioned in the Bible show ... the Israelites' ingenuity in growing, harvesting, and preparing them for use. Fruits were eaten fresh, dried, pressed into cakes, and squeezed for juice". Fruits mentioned include apples, figs, grapes, berries, apricots, melons and pomegranates.

Grapes were particularly popular. "The Bible has more references to grapes and grapevines than to any other fruit and plant except olives and olive trees. Grapes are the

first cultivated plant mentioned in the Bible, Grapes have been shown to fight tooth decay and to stop viruses, and they are high in caffeic acid, a substance shown to be a strong cancerous fighting agent.”

Adding more of these fruits and vegetables to your diet in place of other foods will supply a wealth of nutrition and also help with weight control. "Fruits and veggies come loaded with complex carbohydrates and other essentials for life, such as amino acids and essential fatty acids. They also include many of the natural vitamins and minerals vital to human nutrition. Fruits and vegetables also have both soluble and insoluble fiber that allows our bodies to select what nutrients are needed. This fiber allows many unneeded calories to pass through the intestinal tract.” As this occurs, superfluous calories are eliminated rather than added as body fat.

"A diet consisting predominantly of fruits and vegetables is the most important factor currently identified in the prevention of cancer. The evidence for this is overwhelming: Study after study has confirmed that people who have the highest intakes of fruits and vegetables have the lowest rates of cancer"

Fruits and vegetables may even help prevent Alzheimer's disease. "A new study says a diet rich in fruits and vegetables and less red meat may ward off the degenerative brain disease, which affects 12 million worldwide" (U.S. News & World Report, July 29).

Eating fruit as a substitute for calorie-laden desserts aids weight loss. The natural sugar in fruit is nutritionally superior to processed sugars, which are major contributors to overweight. "In the United States, sugar intake has increased from 1 percent to 20 percent of total calories during the last 200 years. The average American consumes 150 pounds of refined sugar a year".

A large part of that sugar intake comes through soft drinks. "Americans, on average, drink 53 gallons of soda [carbonated soft drinks] per year, 40 percent more than they drank two decades ago" (Harvard Health Letter, February 2001).

Proper eating habits are necessary for good health. If we stuff our bodies with food lacking in nutrition, we will eventually pay the price.

Sadly, in many cultures it isn't easy to select the foods that are best for us. In America,

"of the more than 11,000 new food products that came on the market in 1998, more than two-thirds were candy, snacks, baked goods, soft drinks, ice creams and similar items" (Wellness Letter, June 2002).

How great is the health risk if you are overweight? "Avoiding weight gain may guard against cancer of the colon, kidney, uterus, and breast. Being overweight and/or sedentary also increases the risk of heart disease and diabetes" (Wellness Letter, November 2001).

Which Animals Does the Bible Designate as 'Clean' and 'Unclean'?

God reveals which animals including fish and birds are suitable and unsuitable for human consumption in **Leviticus 11 and Deuteronomy 14**. Although the lists aren't exhaustive, He reveals guidelines for recognizing animals that are acceptable for food.

God states that cud-chewing animals with split hooves can be eaten **Leviticus 11:3; Deuteronomy 14:6**. These specifically include the cattle, sheep, goat, deer and gazelle families **Deuteronomy 14:4-5**. He also lists such animals as camels, rabbits and pigs as being unclean, or unfit to eat **Leviticus 11:4-8**. He later lists such "creeping things" as moles, mice and lizards as unfit to eat **Leviticus 11:29-31**, as well as four-footed animals with paws (cats, dogs, bears, lions, tigers, etc.) as unclean **Leviticus 11:27**.

He tells us that salt and freshwater fish with fins and scales may be eaten **Leviticus 11:9-12**, but water creatures without those characteristics (catfish, lobsters, crabs, shrimp, mussels, clams, oysters, squid, octopi, etc.) should not be eaten.

God also lists birds and other flying creatures that are unclean for consumption **Leviticus 11:13-19**. He identifies carrion eaters and birds of prey as unclean, plus ostriches, storks, herons and bats.

Birds such as chickens, turkeys and pheasants are not on the unclean list and therefore can be eaten. Insects, with the exception of locusts, crickets and grasshoppers, are listed as unclean **Leviticus 11:20-23**.

Why does God identify some animals as suitable for human consumption and others as unsuitable? God didn't give laws to arbitrarily assert control over people. He gave His laws including those of which meats are clean or unclean "that it might be well" with

those who seek to obey Him **Deuteronomy 5:29**.

Although God did not reveal the specific reasons some animals may be eaten and others must be avoided, we can make generalized conclusions based on the animals included in the two categories.

In listing the animals that should not be eaten, God forbids the consumption of scavengers and carrion eaters, which devour other animals for their food.

Animals such as pigs, bears, vultures and raptors can eat and thrive on decaying flesh. Predatory animals such as wolves, lions, leopards and cheetahs most often prey on the weakest and at times the diseased in animal herds.

When it comes to sea creatures, bottom dwellers such as lobsters and crabs scavenge for dead animals on the sea floor. Shellfish such as oysters, clams and mussels similarly consume decaying organic matter that sinks to the sea floor, including sewage.

A common denominator of many of the animals God designates as unclean is that they routinely eat flesh that would sicken or kill human beings. When we eat such animals we partake of a food chain that includes things harmful to people.

God, in His wisdom, created certain creatures whose sole purpose is to clean up after the others? Their entire 'calling' may be to act exclusively as the sanitation workers of our ecology. God may simply be telling us that it's better for us believers not to consume the meat of these trash collectors".

The following list, based on Leviticus 11 and Deuteronomy 14, identifies many of the animals God designates as clean and unclean. The list uses their common names.

Clean Animals:

Mammals That Chew the Cud and Part the Hoof

Antelope, Bison (buffalo), Caribou, Cattle (beef, veal), Deer (venison), Elk, Gazelle, Giraffe, Goat, Hart, Ibex, Moose, Ox, Reindeer, Sheep (lamb, mutton).

Fish With Fins and Scales

Anchovy, Barracuda, Bass, Black pomfret (or monchong), Bluefish, Bluegill, Carp, Cod, Crappie, Drum, Flounder, Grouper, Grunt, Haddock, Hake, Halibut, Hardhead, Herring (or alewife), Kingfish, Mackerel (or corbia), Mahimahi (or dorado, dolphin fish not to be confused with the mammal dolphin), Minnow, Mullet, Perch (or bream), Pike (or pickerel or jack), Pollack (or pollock or Boston bluefish), Rockfish, Salmon, Sardine (or pilchard), Shad, Silver hake (or whiting), Smelt (or frost fish or ice fish), Snapper (or ebu, jobfish, lehi, onaga, opakapaka or uku), Sole, Steelhead, Sucker, Sunfish, Tarpon, Trout (or weakfish), Tuna (or ahi, aku, albacore, bonito or tombo), Turbot (except European turbot), Whitefish.

Birds considered Clean

Chicken, Dove, Duck, Goose, Grouse, Guinea fowl, Partridge, Peafowl, Pheasant, Pigeon, Prairie chicken, Ptarmigan, Quail, Sagehen, Sparrow (and other songbirds), Swan, Teal, Turkey.

Insects

Types of locusts that may include crickets and grasshoppers

In the King James Version, **Leviticus 11:18** and **Deuteronomy 14:16** list "swan" among unclean birds. However, this seems to be a mistranslation. The original word apparently refers to a kind of owl and is so translated in most modern Bible versions.

Unclean Animals:

Animals considered Unclean

Swine, Boar, Peccary, Pig (hog, bacon, ham, lard, pork, most sausage and pepperoni)

Canines, Coyote, Dog, Fox, Hyena, Jackal, Wolf,

Felines, Cat, Cheetah, Leopard, Lion, Panther, Tiger,

Equines, Donkey (ass), Horse, Mule, Onager, Zebra (quagga)

Armadillo, Badger, Bat, Bear, Beaver, Camel, Elephant, Gorilla, Groundhog, Hippopotamus, Kangaroo, Llama (alpaca, vicuña), Mole, Monkey, Mouse, Muskrat, Opossum, Porcupine, Rabbit (hare), Raccoon, Rat, Rhinoceros, Skunk, Slug, Snail (escargot), Squirrel, Wallaby, Weasel, Wolverine, Worm, All insects except some in the locust family

Marine Animals Without Fins and Scales

Fish, Bullhead, Catfish, Eel, European Turbot, Marlin, Paddlefish, Shark, Stickleback, Squid, Sturgeon (includes most caviar), Swordfish.

Shellfish, Abalone, Clam, Conch, Crab, Crayfish (crawfish, crawdad), Lobster, Mussel, Oyster, Scallop, Shrimp (prawn).

Soft body, Cuttlefish, Jellyfish, Limpet, Octopus, Squid (calamari).

Sea mammals, Dolphin, Otter, Porpoise, Seal, Walrus, Whale.

Birds of Prey, Scavengers and Others

Albatross, Bittern, Buzzard, Condor, Coot, Cormorant, Crane, Crow, Cuckoo, Eagle, Flamingo.

Shellfish, Abalone, Clam, Conch, Crab, Crayfish (crawfish, crawdad), Lobster, Mussel, Oyster, Scallop, Shrimp (prawn).

Soft body, Cuttlefish, Jellyfish, Limpet, Octopus, Squid (calamari).

Sea mammals, Dolphin, Otter, Porpoise, Seal, Walrus, Whale.

Birds of Prey, Scavengers and Others

Albatross, Bittern, Buzzard, Condor, Coot, Cormorant, Crane, Crow, Cuckoo, Eagle, Flamingo, Grebe, Grosbeak, Gull, Hawk, Heron, Kite, Lapwing, Loon, Magpie, Osprey, Ostrich, Owl, Parrot, Pelican, Penguin, Plover, Rail, Raven, Roadrunner, Sandpiper, Seagull, Stork, Swallow, Swift, Vulture, Water hen, Woodpecker.

Reptiles, Alligator, Caiman, Crocodile, Lizard, Snake, Turtle.

Amphibians, Blindworm, Frog, Newt, Salamander, Toad.