

TORAH

Genesis 1:29-30

“Every Plant Yielding Seed for 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; and to every beast of the earth and to every bird of the sky and to every thing that moves on the earth which has life, *I have given every green plant for food*’; and it was so.”

From the very start of Creation in the Book of Genesis, instruction about what to, and what not to eat, is given to the first human beings. A majority of interpreters of Genesis 1:29-30 tend to conclude that humans and animals alike are portrayed in the idyllic state in the Garden of Eden, as only being vegetarian. An Orthodox Jewish resource like the *ArtScroll Chumash* asserts, “Man and beast shared the same herbal diet.”¹ A slight variance of this is witnessed in *The Jewish Study Bible*: “Humankind, animals, and birds all seem originally meant to be neither vegetarians nor carnivores, but frugivores, eating the seeds of plants and trees.”²

The instruction delivered in v. 29 is *natatti l'khem et-kol-eisev zorei' a zera* (נָתַתִּי לָכֶם אֶת־כָּל־עֵשֶׂב זֶרַע זֵרַע), “I give you every seed-bearing plant” (NIV). The term *eisev* (עֵשֶׂב) is rendered variably as either “plant” (RSV, NASU, et. al.), “herb” (KJV) or “herbage” (ATS), or “stalk” (Keter Crown Bible), being defined by *CHALOT* with: “**green plants**: weeds, grass, vegetables, cereals, growing during rainy season, not perennials.”³ It is further asserted, *l'khem yih'yeh l'oklah* (לָכֶם יִהְיֶה לְאֹכְלָה), “to you it shall be for food” (NKJV).

At the very beginning, humans were not specifically given any sort of direct permission or allowance for eating meat, with their diet basically limited to fruits and vegetables. Only after the Flood was permission to eat meat or kill animals for food expressly given by God (Genesis 9:2-4). Gordon J. Wenham, though, dissents from this, thinking that “Gen 1...does not forbid the consumption of meat, and it may be that meat eating is envisaged from the time of the fall. Man is expected to rule over the animals,”⁴ as he deduces that the dominion inference from Genesis 1:28 actually does permit killing animals for their meat. Contrary to this, Gerhard Von Rad draws the conclusion, “Killing and slaughtering did not come into the world...by God’s design and command...No shedding of blood within the animal kingdom, and no murderous action by man! This word of God, therefore, also means a limitation in the human right of dominion.”⁵ That it was not until a later time that human beings were permitted to eat meat, is a position witnessed in the Talmud:

“Said R. Judah said Rab, ‘As to the first man, he was not permitted to eat meat. For it is written, “Therefore I have given you all the herbs], to you it shall be for food and to all the beasts of the earth” (Gen. 1:29-30) — [herbs], and the beasts of the earth shall not be for you [to eat]. And when the children of Noah came, [God] permitted [meat] to them. For it is said, “[Every moving thing that lives shall be meat for you;] even as the green herb [now] have I given you all things” (Gen. 9:3)” (b.*Sanhedrin* 59b).⁶

Apparently for the animal kingdom, excluding humankind, it was ideal for them to only eat a vegetarian-style diet as well (v. 30)—which many conclude will be restored to them in the Messianic

¹ Nosson Scherman, ed., et. al., *The ArtScroll Chumash, Stone Edition*, 5th ed. (Brooklyn: Mesorah Publications, 2000), 9.

² Jon D. Levenson, “Genesis,” in Adele Berlin and Marc Zvi Brettler, eds., *The Jewish Study Bible* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 14.

³ *CHALOT*, 284.

⁴ Gordon J. Wenham, *Word Biblical Commentary: Genesis 1-15*, Vol 1 (Dallas: Word Incorporated, 1987), 34.

⁵ Gerhard Von Rad, *Genesis: A Commentary*, revised (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1976), 61.

⁶ *The Babylonian Talmud: A Translation and Commentary*.

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Age, with animals not preying on one another (cf. Isaiah 11:7; 65:25).⁷ Derek Kidner, however, urges some caution, directing readers, “The assigning of *every green plant for food* (RSV) to all creatures must not be pressed to mean that all were once herbivorous, any more than to mean that all plants were equally edible to all. It is a generalization, that directly or indirectly all life depends on vegetation, and the concern of the verse is to show that all are fed from God’s hand.”⁸ This is probably where readers of the early chapters of Genesis have to weigh the fact that Genesis 1-11, and principally chs. 1-4, are concerned more with a theology of Creation, its goodness, the Flood, the first judgment, and the recreation after the Flood—than they are about various, specific Twenty-First Century concerns about science, biology, or zoology.⁹

Theologically speaking, the Lord’s word *natatti* (נָתַתִּי), “I have given” (v. 29), is worthy of note, being a reflection of His provision for both humanity and the animal kingdom. David Atkinson draws the attention of readers to how God’s provision runs in contrast to various Mesopotamian creation myths, and also how all creatures in God’s Creation are interdependent on one another *but ultimately* dependent upon Him:

“In contrast to the Mesopotamian stories in which human beings have to provide food for the gods, here, God does the providing. And in this provision is another reminder of the interdependence of creation. We are participators in the creation, which we need for life, just as the rest of creation needs us to cultivate and preserve it. The ecosystems in which the life-cycles of all creatures are set; the need each creature has for sustenance from within the rest of the created order; the need, therefore, for a creation in which that mutual need and interdependence is respected: all this needs to be related to the fact that it is God who provides food.”¹⁰

Kenneth A. Matthews draws a similar conclusion:

“Biblical creation shows that God honors the human family by specifically addressing them (‘you’) as he gives them charge over the terrestrial world (v. 29). Moreover, ‘every’ and ‘all’ (vv. 29-30) emphasize the availability and generosity of God’s provision.”¹¹

Obviously, God’s instruction regarding food for people in Genesis 1:29-30, was given at a very early stage in ancient history, with more to be communicated regarding the principles of eating meat in general, what meats were prohibited, and various preparation issues involved in eating meat. Matthews’ commentary on Genesis further guides readers to additional issues to be explored in the Torah, Tanach, and later the Apostolic Scriptures:

“God’s dietary standards for mankind specifically include meat in the postdiluvian world (9:3). Dietary prescriptions become increasingly important in the Mosaic community (Lev 11; Deut 14), and dietary habits become a mark of fidelity to God and of one’s ‘Jewishness’ (e.g., Dan 1:8; Act 10:12-14; Col 2:16).”¹²

Regardless of some of the conclusions that some may draw regarding these passages, the issues surrounding eating in the Tanach or Old Testament—and what continues further in the Apostolic Writings or New Testament—are hardly over!

⁷ Cf. J.H. Hertz, ed., *Pentateuch & Haftorahs* (London: Soncino, 1960), 5; Nahum M. Sarna, *JPS Torah Commentary: Genesis* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1989), pp 13-14.

⁸ Derek Kidner, *Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries: Genesis* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1969), 52.

⁹ A highly useful review would be C. John Collins, *Genesis 1-4: A Linguistic, Literary, and Theological Commentary* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2006).

For an excellent analysis of the relevant Creationist data, the publishers highly recommend Hugh Ross, *The Genesis Question: Scientific Advances and the Accuracy of Genesis*, second expanded edition (Colorado Springs: NavPress, 2001); *A Matter of Days: Resolving a Creation Controversy* (Colorado Springs: NavPress, 2004); *Navigating Genesis: A Scientist’s Journey through Genesis 1-11* (Covina, CA: Reasons to Believe, 2014).

¹⁰ David Atkinson, *The Message of Genesis 1-11* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1990), 42.

¹¹ Kenneth A. Matthews, *New American Commentary: Genesis 1-11:26*, Vol 1a (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1996), 175.

¹² *Ibid.*