

## Genesis 9:2-4

### “Noah is Given Permission to Eat Meat”

“The fear of you and the terror of you will be on every beast of the earth and on every bird of the sky; with everything that creeps on the ground, and all the fish of the sea, into your hand they are given. Every moving thing that is alive shall be food for you; I give all to you, as I gave the green plant. Only you shall not eat flesh with its life, *that is*, its blood.”

All readers of Genesis 9:2-4 can agree that included within the post-Flood instructions to Noah is an explicit allowance by God for human beings to eat meat. Even if for some reason or another, people may have eaten meat prior to the Flood, they now have the expressed permission by God to do so. The only clear prohibition or limitation upon eating animal flesh is the requirement to not consume blood, something which features prominently in later Torah instruction to the Ancient Israelites (Leviticus 17:10-14; Deuteronomy 12:23-25). A general analysis of what is seen in Genesis 9:2-4 is acknowledged by T. Desmond Alexander:

“While God’s speech here closely parallels 1:18-20, two important changes are introduced. First, the positive instruction to exercise dominion over the living creatures is replaced by the negative comment that they will **fear** and **dread** human beings. Second, whereas the emphasis was previously on people’s eating from plants, humans are now given permission to be carnivorous. While God now permits the taking of animal life for food, the animal’s blood remains sacred and is not to be consumed, as an acknowledgment that all life is from God (see Lev. 17:12-14).”<sup>1</sup>

The post-Flood scene, where humanity has to start over, is one where not all things are grand. The dominion that people get to extend over the planet is one that is tempered by fear: “The fear and dread of you will fall upon all the beasts of the earth and all the birds of the air, upon every creature that moves along the ground, and upon all the fish of the sea; they are given into your hands” (Genesis 9:2, NIV). And it is with this in mind, that God tells Noah, “Every moving thing that lives shall be food for you” (Genesis 9:3a, ATS).

Within the assertion *kol-remes asher hu-chai l'khem yih'yeh l'oklah* (אֲשֶׁר הוּא־חַי לְכֶם יִהְיֶה לְאֹכְלָהּ) (כָּל־רֶמֶשׁ), “All stirring things that are alive, yours shall be for food” (Genesis 9:3a, Alter), is the issue of whether or not animals later to be classified as unclean, are acceptable eating for Noah and his company. There are interpreters who would say yes.<sup>2</sup> There are those who would say that clean or unclean animals is not the issue, and the more pressing issue is the Genesis 9:4 prohibition against consuming blood.<sup>3</sup> And, there are those like Gordon J. Wenham, who are not so sure. In his view,

“Whether this permission to eat meat meant that Noah could eat unclean as well as clean creatures is uncertain. The silence of the text on this issue is usually taken to mean that he was not restricted to clean creatures. However, the frequent mention of the difference between clean and unclean animals elsewhere in the story makes it problematic to assert that total freedom is being given here...This passage’s keen concern with other food rules, e.g., no consumption of blood or cadavers, suggests that the unclean/clean distinction may be taken for granted. Be that as it may, the food laws certainly view the prohibition of the consumption of blood as more important than not eating unclean animals.”<sup>4</sup>

Much is obviously contingent on how one approaches the Hebrew term *remes* (רֶמֶשׂ), which *CHALOT* defines regarding “[the] animal world exc. large animals & birds: coll. **small animals, reptiles**.”<sup>5</sup> It does have to be conceded, from a lexical standpoint, that the *remes* in view, which

<sup>1</sup> Alexander, in *ESV Study Bible*, 65.

<sup>2</sup> John H. Marks, “The Book of Genesis,” in Charles M. Laymon, ed., *Interpreter’s One-Volume Commentary on the Bible* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1971), 9; Friedman, *Commentary on the Torah*, 41-42.

<sup>3</sup> Terence E. Fretheim, “The Book of Genesis,” in Leander E. Keck, ed., et. al., *New Interpreter’s Bible* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1994), 1:399.

<sup>4</sup> Wenham, *Genesis 1-15*, pp 192-193.

<sup>5</sup> *CHALOT*, 341.

## Messianic Kosher Helper

Noah is given permission to eat, might include a wide range of animals. Then again, due to the unique nature of the material in this early part of the Book of Genesis, and with its strong connections to similar Ancient Near Eastern materials, one needs to exhibit some reserve.

John H. Walton is one who concludes that *remes* in Genesis 9:3 should not be taken as a reference to all moving animals, but mainly undomesticated animals like wild cattle, antelope, fallow deer, gazelle, and ibex—which would obviously end up on the clean animal lists of Leviticus 11 and Deuteronomy 14. He draws this conclusion by making connections between the noun *remes* (רִמָּשׁ) and verb *ramas* (רָמַשׁ), and various cognates witnessed in Akkadian:

"[T]he category given for food is *remes* (NIV, 'everything that moves'). The noun (*remes*) and the associated verb (*rams*) each occur seventeen times in the Old Testament, ten times each in Genesis 1-9. This word group is distinct from both the wild (predatory) beasts and domesticated flocks and herds. Neither verb nor noun is ever used to refer to larger wild animals or to domesticated animals. In no place is *remes* a catch-all category for all creatures. It is one category of creature only. The division of the Hebrew terms used up to this point in Genesis reflects the nature of the animal (not the locomotion, genre, species, or the morphology).

"If this is true, we are mistaken to translate *remes* as if it describes a type of locomotion (e.g., 'creeping things'). An alternative is suggested by the Akkadian cognate *nammašu/nammaštu*, which typically refers to wild animals that travel in herds; they are distinct from wild animals that hunt or scavenge, from the domesticated cattle, and from the docile beasts that do not tend to be found in herds. It is most familiar as the group that Enkidu watched over in his precivilized days in the Gilgamesh Epic. These animals were typically characterized as being the prey of hunters and predatory beasts. The most common members of this group were wild cattle, antelope, fallow deer, gazelle, and ibex. Some of these could be managed, though not domesticated..."<sup>6</sup>

If this is a more accurate way to view the *kol-remes* of Genesis 9:3, then it would not be an allowance for Noah and company to eat animals classified as unclean—but rather for them to exercise dominion over various wild animals that can be caught, perhaps force-domesticated to some degree, but certainly used as food.

The major thrust of Genesis 9:2-4 is the general permission given to humanity by God to eat meat. It can be deduced that this is given with some degree of separating out clean and unclean animals in mind, given the fact that the seven pairs of clean animals (cf. Genesis 7:1-2) would have been the main sources of meat for Noah and company upon conclusion of the Flood. The main stipulation with eating meat is, "But you must never eat any meat that still has the lifeblood in it" (Genesis 9:4, NLT). Immediately, on the heels of this direction, is a reminder that God will hold people accountable to slay or murder other people, with murder of others being a probable cause of His sending the Flood (cf. Genesis 6:5):

"Surely I will require your lifeblood; from every beast I will require it. And from every man, from every man's brother I will require the life of man. Whoever sheds man's blood, by man his blood shall be shed, for in the image of God He made man" (Genesis 9:5-6).

David Atkinson is one who does not see the post-Flood scene of Genesis 9:2-4ff as being at all ideal or wonderful. He observes, "Now we read of animals being used for food. Now we read of murder and capital punishment. God's law is now a law for an abnormal world. His law comes, as it were, refracted through the disordered relationships which mark even this new start."<sup>7</sup> To a wide degree, the permission to eat animal flesh is given to recognize how humankind has now reached a new low of sorts. *Better for humans to kill and eat animals than murder themselves*, might be a possible thought. Victor P. Hamilton draws the assessment,

"Here, the exercise of man's authority provides terrifying consequences for the animal world. Not all the pre-Flood relationships will be restored. At least a few situations will be different, and

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<sup>6</sup> Walton, *Genesis*, pp 341-342.

<sup>7</sup> Atkinson, 156.

## Genesis 9:2-4 Eating and Kosher in the Tanach

man's relationship to the animal world is one of them. Human exploitation of animal life is here set within the context of a post-Flood, deteriorated situation. It is radically different from the ideal of Gen. 1."<sup>8</sup>

Further Torah instruction will deliberate on the specifics of what it means to not consume blood, what clean and unclean animals specifically are, and some of the consequences that will ensue for these instructions being violated.

(Genesis 9:3-7 has been addressed in much more detail in Chapter 5, the exegesis paper entitled, "**Why Meat?**")

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<sup>8</sup> Hamilton, *Genesis 1-17*, pp 313-314.