

Health and Healing

Nutrition in the Bible

Lesson #12 for June 19, 2010

Scriptures: Genesis 1:26-30; 7:1,2; 8:20; 9:2-4; Leviticus 11; Deuteronomy 14; Proverbs 23:19-21; Acts 10:1-28; Romans 14:17; 1 Timothy 4:1-5.

1. The focus of this lesson is on how true Christian believers can choose a diet that is truly healthful. Why do we eat what we eat? Do we allow our taste buds to control our diet? Do we follow biblical advice and eat for strength and not for drunkenness? (Ecclesiastes 10:17) How do we develop a taste for certain foods? Recent studies suggest that the mother's diet even when a child is *in utero* prepares that child for certain tastes later in his life. The same would be true during breast-feeding.
2. Read Genesis 1:26-31. The original diet which God planned for us to eat included green plants bearing seed and trees bearing seed. A careful evaluation of these verses tells us that our diet originally was supposed to include fruits, nuts, and grains.
3. After sin, Adam and Eve were thrown out of the garden, and green (wild) plants (vegetables) were added to their diet. (Genesis 3:18) Probably, vegetables were not part of the original diet because the vegetable is part of the plant itself—such as a root of the plant—and to eat the vegetable would require destruction of the plant.
4. It was not until many, many years later after the flood when presumably a wide variety of the best possible fruits, nuts, and grains was not available that Noah's family was permitted to eat animals, birds, and fish, **but no blood**. (Genesis 9:2-4) Is the life really in the blood? Look at things from their ancient perspective. If an animal or a human was seriously injured, blood would come out. If nothing was done to stop it, eventually, the victim would die. Thus, it seemed clear to them that the life was in the blood. As we have seen often before, God speaks to us in a language that we can understand.
5. Today, we use the words *omnivore* for someone who eats all kinds of things from both plant and animal sources, *carnivore* for those who eat primarily meat as well as some plant foods, and *herbivore* for those who eat only plant-sourced foods. A more common term would be *meat-eaters* versus *vegetarians*. Those who eat no foods from animal sources are called *vegans*. Those who eat only plant-sourced foods plus milk and eggs are called *lacto-ovo-vegetarians* or *ovo-lacto-vegetarians*. Is "vegetarian" a good name to use? Some people think that vegetarian means they only eat vegetables—no fruits, nuts, or grains!
6. Nutritionally and physically, our entire bodies and brains are made up of what we eat. What we eat forms the building blocks from which our bodies are made.
7. After the children of Israel came out of slavery in Egypt and were traveling through the Sinai desert, God gave them some specific instructions about which animals in that environment were safe to eat. (Leviticus 11) We are not sure exactly what types of animals and birds are referred to by all the names that are mentioned in that chapter. The chapter makes it clear that animals that chew the cud and have a split hoof are generally safe to eat. Why did God say only to eat fish that had fins and scales? When the children of Israel were camped on the east side of the Jordan River getting ready to enter the land of Canaan, Moses repeated those same instructions to the next generation, and that is recorded in Deuteronomy 14. That chapter includes some additional very surprising information about the use of the tithes and prohibiting boiling a kid in its mother's milk.

(Deuteronomy 14:22-27) Boiling a kid in its mother's milk was a part of some of the ancient fertility cult worship ceremonies. (See Ras Shamra tablets) Thus, God was trying to protect them by forbidding this practice. Why did God apparently allow the children of Israel who lived far away from Jerusalem to attend the Passover and purchase not only meat products but also alcohol to share with pastors as they celebrated the Passover? God was suggesting that to come humbly before Him to worship is more important than what we eat or drink. If we lose contact with God, we lose eternal life, not just this life.

8. Would you like to try some manna?
9. Many, many scientific articles have been written based on years and years of detailed scientific research which demonstrates that the original diet that God recommended—a diet consisting of fruits, nuts, and grains with the later addition of vegetables—form the healthiest diet. The Adventist Health Study and related studies which have been in progress for about 50 years have demonstrated that people who follow this type of diet have less heart disease, less cancer, less hypertension, less diabetes, less dementia, and less osteoporosis. Following such a diet adds 8 to 10 healthy years to a person's life. Those who eat such a diet, of course, tend to eat less refined grain products, less sugar, and less prepared foods. (See also *The China Study* by T. Colin Campbell)
10. In your mind, what is the most compelling reason for following such a diet: 1) The fact that it is the diet recommended in Scripture as originally given by God? or, 2) The fact that a great deal of scientific research supports this diet in modern times?
11. After the great disappointment in 1844, a group of former "adventists" who began to worship on the seventh day also began to study their Bibles very seriously to determine God's will for their lives. They also were guided by the visions of Ellen G. White. Those early adventists not only ate meat of all types including unclean meat, but some of them also were smokers and alcohol drinkers. A study of the historical records shows that many of them soon gave up those unhealthful practices for one reason or another. It was not until the Seventh-day Adventist Church was organized in 1863 that Ellen White was given her first health vision. Why do you think God chose to wait that long before focusing on health?
12. There are places in the world where the variety of foods available is severely limited. In such circumstances, the Scriptures clearly allow for people to adapt their diets as necessary. However, in places where a wide variety of foods is available, God's original diet has certainly proven to be superior in every way. Fruits, grains, nuts, and vegetables with the addition of a small amount of vitamin B₁₂ from milk and eggs or a vitamin tablet provides the healthiest diet.
13. Consider the story of Eve's temptation in Genesis 3:1-6. We often suggest that she was tempted in the area of diet. Was she really tempted because she was hungry? Or was she deceived? She had available to her sufficient fruits, nuts, and grains of a variety of types so that there was no need for her to eat of the fruit of the tree of knowledge.
14. Read Genesis 9:2-4. These verses record the first time God was permitting human beings to use the flesh of animals, birds, and fish as a food. However, what very important restriction was placed on the use of such foods?
15. Why did God tell them not to eat any blood? The flavor in meat comes from the waste products that are carried in the blood. For those who have a question about this, try this simple experiment. Take a small cube of your favorite meat, and squeeze as much of the liquid out of it as possible. Then boil it for a short period of time, squeeze out the liquid

again, and see what it tastes like. It has almost no flavor at all. Is it possible that God told them not to eat any blood so that they would not develop an appetite for flesh foods?

16. Before we leave the story of the flood, we need to read Genesis 7:1,2 and 8:20. Notice that God had already made a clear distinction between clean and unclean animals and meats before the flood—long before there was a Hebrew nation and long before there were any Jews on this earth. The distinction between clean and unclean meats was clearly delineated in much greater detail in Leviticus 11 and Deuteronomy 14. Most of us would recognize almost immediately that scavengers and rodents are not an ideal source of food! Do you think that God intended those two lists of clean and unclean meats to be the final definition for people living in all parts of the world? If we truly followed God’s directions and as far as possible removed the blood from every form of meat before we ate it, would meat cease to be a major part of the diet of most people?
17. In modern times people have practiced eating, drinking, sniffing, or smoking almost every substance that you can name. Some people even claim that it is their right as a religious freedom to ingest some of those substances. The Bible does not specifically mention things like marijuana, heroin, methamphetamine, or even tobacco. Does that mean that we are free to use such substances? Of course not! There is plenty of good evidence to suggest that those are dangerous substances when taken into the human body. Just as we do not pour water or sugar into the gasoline tank of our car, we should only consume foods that are nutritionally sound and support good nutrition.
18. Unfortunately, many Christians claim that all the limitations on the use of flesh meat in the Old Testament are only ritual and have nothing to do with health. They go on to claim that those distinctions were obliterated in the times of the New Testament. What do you think?
19. Read Romans 14; 1 Corinthians 8:4-13; 10:23-33. Paul was dealing with a situation which developed in a number of cities in his day where most of the meats brought into the public markets were first taken to pagan temples, and a portion of the meat was offered to the pagan god at that temple. Thus, it was believed by the pagans that all of the meat had been blessed by the pagan god. The passages in Romans and 1 Corinthians are dealing with these issues about foods offered to idols and have nothing directly to do with what is healthful or not healthful. Does offering a piece of meat to an idol affect the meat in any way? Of course not! That is, unless one really believes that the idol has some existence.
20. Read 1 Timothy 4:1-5. These verses are often used against Seventh-day Adventists and others who limit their diets for religious reasons. But, notice that the passage talks about people who *forbid marriage* as well as certain foods. The only group that qualifies under this passage is the Roman Catholic Church which for centuries forbade the eating of flesh foods on Fridays—except fish—for ceremonial or ritualistic reasons and forbade marriage for priests.
21. Some people also read Acts 10 believing that the story of the sheet which was let down in vision before Peter suggests that all foods are safe to eat. In Acts 10:28, it is clear that this vision was not given regarding eating habits but rather about associating with non-Christians, eating with them, and carrying the gospel to them. Make sure to look at Acts 11:17 to see what the leaders of the church concluded after talking with Peter about this experience. In passing, it should be noted that Peter was staying in the home of a tanner—a man whose profession was dealing with dead animals! In that profession the tanner would be perpetually ritually “unclean,” and anyone who touched him would be unclean.
22. Vegetarians often turn to Daniel 1 as an example of the best kind of diet. What is included

in “pulse”? The original Hebrew *pulse* means “plants that are planted” or “sown.” This would imply a simple vegetable diet. It may also have included some fruits.

23. We should note that in addition to the type of food, health is determined also by how we eat our food and how much we eat. What is the Bible’s advice on this subject? (Proverbs 23:19-21) If we are not to associate with people who eat too much, does that forbid our going to Adventist potlucks?
24. In order to know what are the best foods, we must study God’s original plan for man’s diet. . . . Grains, fruits, nuts, and vegetables . . . prepared in as simple and natural a manner as possible are the most healthful and nourishing. They impart a strength, a power of endurance, and a vigor of intellect that are not afforded by a more complex and stimulating diet.—Ellen G. White, *The Ministry of Healing*, pp. 295, 296.
25. Following the guidance from Ellen White, the Seventh-day Adventist Church has not chosen to make vegetarianism a test of fellowship. There are several reasons for that. Nevertheless, for those who live in areas where a wide variety of foods are available, a diet of fruits, nuts, grains, and vegetables with a small amount of milk and eggs—or vitamin supplements—to get some vitamin B₁₂ seems to be the best diet. Modern athletes involved in endurance sports have discovered the benefits of such a diet. They follow that diet for health reasons and not for religious reasons.
26. Modern nutrition recommends following what is called a food pyramid. At the bottom of the pyramid are things like whole grains including whole grain breads, pasta, and brown rice. Those are to be eaten in fairly large quantities. The next level up which is a smaller level includes fruits and vegetables, of which we should consume 5 to 9 servings per day. Above that are dairy products and eggs which could be eaten two or three times per day. Even further up on the pyramid are legumes, nuts, seeds, and meat alternatives for vegetarians. For nonvegetarians, this small section includes fish, poultry, and meat, but only in small quantities. And finally, at the top of the pyramid, are things which should be eaten only in very small quantities such as fats, oils, sweets, and iodized salt.
27. There is an abundance of information about the food pyramid and various diets available in libraries, through the Coronary Health Improvement Project (CHIP), or on the Internet. Most of us can find enough of the healthiest foods to eat if we choose to do so.
28. Those of us who choose to become God’s friends and seek to become as much like Him as possible through Bible study, prayer, and witnessing, should practice living as healthy a lifestyle as possible. Thus, we can be examples for others around us. We should not allow developed tastes for harmful substances to shorten our lives, ruin our health, or unfit us in any way to be witnesses for God’s cause.

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