

## 12. Nutrition in the Bible (2Q 2010—Health and Healing)

**Biblical material:** Gen. 1:26–30; 7:1, 2; 8:20; Leviticus 11; Deuteronomy 14; Prov. 23:19–21; Acts 10:1–28; Rom. 14:17; 1 Tim. 4:1–5, 1 Cor. 10:31.

### Quotes

- Life expectancy would grow by leaps and bounds if green vegetables smelled as good as bacon. *Doug Larson*
- Doctors are always working to preserve our health and cooks to destroy it, but the latter are the more often successful. *Denis Diderot*
- Eat every meal as though it were your last. *Garfield the Cat*
- Is there nothing doughnuts can't do? *Homer Simpson*
- Recognize meat for what it really is: the antibiotic- and pesticide-laden corpse of a tortured animal. *Ingrid Newkirk*
- Nothing will benefit human health and increase chances for survival of life on Earth as much as the evolution to a vegetarian diet. *Albert Einstein*
- You cannot achieve environmental security and human development without addressing the basic issues of health and nutrition. *Gro H. Brundtland*

### Questions

Why is a discussion of diet important in a religious context? How can issues of diet be abused and misapplied? What is the goal of proper nutrition? How do the Old Testament rules apply today? What is the best approach to such a discussion? How can we have a balanced approach to dietary matters? What does God think of all this?

### Bible discussion

The original nutrition plan in Genesis (1:26-30) consisted of a plant-based diet, particularly of seeds and fruits, with green vegetation for the animals. After the Flood, meat-eating was permitted (Gen. 7-9), with exceptions as listed in Lev. 11 and Deut. 14. Eating too much meat and drinking too much wine is condemned in Prov. 23:19–21. The vision in Acts 10 has nothing to do with diet. The previous dietary taboos that relate to “uncleanness” no longer apply (Rom. 14:17; 1 Tim. 4:1–5), but that’s not to say everything people eat is wise and healthy! Our whole diet is for God’s glory (1 Cor. 10:31).

### Comment

When it comes to issues of diet there’s always plenty of discussion! It almost seems that we’re obsessed by diet, and a quick look at TV and magazines would confirm that observation. There are more diets available than days of the week, and all kinds of claims made. Add to that the “religious” component that makes the eating of some foods “an abomination” and you have great scope for controversy, even within the church.

So what’s the point of diet? To live well and healthily, surely! The Old Testament regulations provided a diet baseline for a people who needed strict regulations. However the whole concept of something being “unclean” no longer applies, even though many of the food items mentioned we would never consider eating! Nor are the OT food laws

arbitrary—they have been found to contain good science. But today the emphasis must be on *healthy* living, not avoidance because of some taboo. The debate centers on what actually is healthy!

Then there's the question why. Why do we want to be healthy? The New Testament emphasizes health for the purpose of living for God. We want to be able to function well in doing the Lord's will. This is no selfish obsession, but a desire to be of the best service in representing the truth about God. Wellness based on good nutrition is very much part of this witness, and in itself reflects on our concepts of the character of God.

If healthy living catches people's attention first and then leads them to question the basis, then that's good—if we give the right reasons for what we do! If it's just to live longer, or be able to do more things to satisfy our self-centered desires, then we're engaging in false advertising... Physical health and nutrition need to be correlated with spiritual health and nutrition, so that whatever we eat and drink we do all to the glory of God.

So as we speak to others about good health practices and diet we need to make sure we don't fall into the trap of making the gospel into food and drink, or make salvation conditional on health reform. We receive many benefits from wise choices in this area, but let's not make this central in our witness. The good news is about God, not about eating nut-loaf and avoiding whisky, good that such behaviour may be. For in the end, no diet will ensure we live forever. We want a good quality of life here and now, and proper diet can help with that and ensure our brains can work well—important in our spiritual health. But only God can give us eternal life. Only God provides water that makes sure we never thirst again, and the bread of heaven that will sustain us for all eternity.

### **Ellen White Comments**

Get the best cook possible, and do not limit the food to that which would suit the taste of some who are rigid health reformers. Were the patients given this food only, they would become disgusted, because it would taste so insipid. It is not thus that souls are to be won to the truth in our sanitariums... It is possible to avoid rich cooking, and yet make the food palatable... There is a way of combining and preparing food that will make it both wholesome and nourishing. Those in charge of the cooking in our sanitariums should understand how to do this. The matter should be treated from a Bible standpoint. There is such a thing as robbing the body of nutrition. The preparation of the food in the best manner possible is to become a science. {CD 289-90}

Our bodies are built up from the food we eat. There is a constant breaking down of the tissues of the body; every movement of every organ involves waste, and this waste is repaired from our food. Each organ of the body requires its share of nutrition. The brain must be supplied with its portion; the bones, muscles, and nerves demand theirs. It is a wonderful process that transforms the food into blood and uses this blood to build up the varied parts of the body; but this process is going on continually, supplying with life and strength each nerve, muscle, and tissue. {CG 378}

Those who eat flesh are but eating grains and vegetables at second hand; for the animal receives from these things the nutrition that produces growth. The life that was in the grains and vegetables passes into the eater. We receive it by eating the flesh of the animal. How much better to get it direct, by eating the food that God provided for our use! {CD 313}

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