

Plants Only for Animals?

A Young Earth Creationist Argument Contradicted by the Bible

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Texts: Genesis 1:30 and 9:3

(unless noted otherwise, the English Standard Version is used)

1. Young Earth Creationism

Young Earth Creationists (YEC) believe that death had not entered the world before the fall of the first humans. Therefore, they believe that initially there could not have been any carnivorous animals, and accordingly, they interpret the creation account in this sense. They try to support this belief by what God told the first humans (Genesis 1:30), and later Noah (Genesis 9:3), when he mentioned the food he had given humans and animals to eat. But this YEC argument doesn't hold water. This can be shown purely on the basis of the biblical text, which shows such an interpretation to be a distortion of the text.

2. Green plants for all animals as the creation order?

In Genesis 1:29-30, God tells the first humans what he had given his creatures to eat:

²⁹ ... Behold, I have given you every plant yielding seed that is on the face of all the earth, and every tree with seed in its fruit. You shall have them for food. ³⁰ And to every beast of the earth and to every bird of the heavens and to everything that creeps on the earth, everything that has the breath of life, [I have given] every green plant for food.

Does this mean that God, in his creation order, decided that initially, humans and all animals should have plant food only? It is to the *animals* that God gave "green plants" for food, not to humans.

3. Meat in addition to green plants for Noah after the Flood?

It seems that after the flood, God again dealt with the same question of what his creatures should eat. In Genesis 9:2-3, God tells Noah and his sons:

² The fear of you and the dread of you shall be upon every beast of the earth and upon every bird of the heavens, upon everything that creeps on the ground and all the fish of the sea. Into your hand they are delivered. ³ Every moving thing that lives shall be food for you. And as I gave you the green plants, I give you everything.

Here, the same expression "green plants", as in the creation report, occurs again (in the whole bible, the Hebrew "*yereq ^esev*" appears in Genesis 1:30 and 9:3 only). Should this divine pronouncement to Noah indicate that it was after the flood only that humans were permitted to eat meat, in addition to "plants yielding seed", which are mentioned in 1:29 as human food? Unlike Genesis 1:30, which assigns the "green plants" to *animals*, in Genesis 9:3, it refers to *human* food.

4. Inconsistencies in the immediate context

How about the animals? In the YEC view, the lion initially ate grass, beginning to devour meat after Adam's fall only – as a consequence of God's curse on the ground. But *when* did the lion begin to hunt, rather than eating grass – immediately after the fall, or after Noah's flood only? Or are both scenarios absurd?

The YEC interpretation is inseparably linked to the belief in a global flood, for it is only by this means that surviving humanity is restricted to the 8 persons of Noah's family – another unbiblical YEC postulate. Such a catastrophic, global flood would also have killed all animals except the ones in Noah's ark. But in the ark, carnivores wouldn't have been able to survive, having nothing to eat, as most of their prey were taken aboard as single pairs only, which must not be eaten.

This implies that the transmutation of certain herbivores into carnivores, supposedly a consequence of the first human fall into sin, did not occur immediately after Adam's fall, but only after the flood, more than 1000 years later. But no matter *when* such a transmutation of today's carnivores was supposed to

have happened, it would have required a large number of incredible, momentaneous macroevolutionary steps for every one of today's carnivore species – all in all an enormous divine miracle, about which the bible doesn't mention a word.

Furthermore, Adam's son Abel brought God animal offerings (Genesis 4:4). Did he abstain from eating animals of his herd? Were milk and wool the only things he made use of? Noah, as well, presented burnt offerings "of every clean animal and some of every clean bird" (Genesis 8:20), *before* God is supposed to have explicitly allowed him meat for food. Has no human eaten any meat for 1000 years?

5. The use of fish

In the same two contexts, where God talks about the food for the first humans and for Noah, God also subjects all fish to human dominion. About the first humans, God says in Genesis 1:26 and 28:

²⁶ "... let them have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over the livestock and over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth." ... ²⁸
And God blessed them. And God said to them, "Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over every living thing that moves on the earth."

In all of Genesis, this statement about human dominion over the fish is found only here for the first humans and in 9:2-3 for Noah.

Can "having dominion" over the fish refer to anything but catching and eating them (in contrast to the use of some products obtained from sheep or birds)? Thus, according to God's creation order (proclaimed before the fall), the first humans were allowed to eat fish (and, by implication, meat). Therefore, animal death occurred before Adam's fall already.

6. Creation order without food restrictions

What does Genesis 1:26-30 *really* say about the food given to animals and humans? This text explicitly describes the original creation order, without any reference to the fall.

For humans, there is "every plant yielding seed". Instead of "plant" (English Standard and New International versions), the King James Version has "herb". Various cereal crops were then and are now of fundamental importance for human nutrition: these may be indicated here primarily. Then, "trees" with "seed in its fruit" are mentioned, and these representatives of vitamin-rich foods might indicate the second fundamental component of human nutrition (verse 29). There certainly is no reason to exclude any other plant food not mentioned here. Just as much lacking is any prohibition of eating meat – on the contrary, humans are explicitly commanded to have dominion over "the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over every living thing that moves on the earth" (verses 26 and 28). How should the people who heard or read that have concluded that they were allowed to "have dominion" over the animals, but were forbidden to *eat* them?

"And to every beast of the earth and to every bird of the heavens and to everything that creeps on the earth, everything that has the breath of life," God gave "every green plant [*yereq ^esev*] for food" (verse 30). For "plant", the same word *^esev* is used as with respect to human food in verse 29. Again, nothing is mentioned explicitly which would *not* have been given them for food - no prohibition of meat.

Humans and certain animal species are able to live on a purely vegetarian diet, and certain species are obligatory vegetarians, others facultatively vegetarian only, or even "omnivores". But the first readers of this text certainly knew that certain animals are partially or exclusively carnivores. If it had been different before the creation of humans, or before the first fall, the text would presumably have to say so explicitly in order to be understood by those readers. Also, the fact that all prey of carnivores are either herbivores or themselves carnivores would certainly have been familiar to them. So they knew that, in the final analysis, all food is derived from plants – and this is all that the text says explicitly: the food of all animals comes from plants. Any different interpretation of the text would certainly not have occurred to its first readers.

7. No new food order for Noah, but expiation for human blood shed

The section of Genesis 9:1-7, in which the "green plants" are mentioned, contains God's blessing for Noah and his family. Prominently into this blessing, God places the great importance that he attributes to life – and in particular to human life in *contradistinction* to animal life. For human blood shed, a reckoning shall be required from the murderer, but also from the wild animal. Thus, Noah knew the predatory animals as such. They did not become predators at that time only. Otherwise, Noah would not have understood the blessing given him.

Life is symbolized in the blood, and God confers to the blood an immeasurable dignity or sanctity as fundamentally belonging to God. In Leviticus 17:11, God explains this to the people of Israel:

For the life of the flesh is in the blood, and I have given it for you on the altar to make atonement for your souls, for it is the blood that makes atonement by the life.

The concept of "soul" is used for the biological life as a whole, both in the Old Testament (*nephesch*) and in the New Testament (*psyche*), not for a soul in contrast to the body, and in particular, it is used for both animals and humans indiscriminately. What distinguishes humans from animals is not the soul, but the spirit, "God's image".

From the beginning, all animal sacrifices had to point forward to the one coming propitiatory sacrifice of Jesus on the cross. In the Noah text, therefore, in connection with meat as food, the eating of blood is forbidden. That God has given humans all plant and animal food is here indirectly endorsed by emphasizing this as the sole restriction in God's rich variety of foods offered to humans. But the restriction was necessary until Jesus' death on the cross only, in order to impress upon people in Old Testament times the unique spiritual significance of the blood.

What is new now, beginning with Noah's time, is the requirement of a human judiciary authority punishing murder, and this with the death sentence. In fact, the development of larger spheres of political control having corresponding judiciary institutions probably began about during that time, after Noah's flood around 2900 BC.

Thus, the text does not at all imply that meat was now introduced as a new food offer. Such an interpretation of the "Every moving thing that lives shall be food for you" (Genesis 9:3) would be read into the text.

8. Young Earth Creationism in contradiction to the full biblical context

If the biblical texts are really taken seriously as divinely inspired, conclusions are called for which differ from YEC. The Genesis statements about plant food are misused if taken as supporting YEC. The idea of God manipulating the animal species which today are carnivores (a majority of the animals) to such an extent – without giving a single word of explanation for such a radical operation, contradicts God's biblically documented way of acting. Furthermore, such a claim represents a distortion of God's Word, an "adding" to it (Revelation 22:18), which must be under his judgement.

All this has to be said even from an exclusively biblical point of view, quite apart from the scientifically documented fact that YEC is completely out of touch with reality. In particular, this concerns the reliability of geological datings, the physical impossibility of a global flood, as well as the genetic continuity between all biological species and their impossibility of undergoing more than very slow change only.