

Genesis 9:3-7

Why Meat?

by J.K. McKee posted 01 February, 2009 www.tnnonline.net

GENESIS 9:3-7 - ENGLISH

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. 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. As for you, be fruitful and multiply; populate the earth abundantly and multiply in it (NASU).

All stirring things that are alive, yours shall be for food, like the green plants, I have given all to you. But flesh with its lifeblood still in it you shall not eat. And just so, your lifeblood I will requite, from every beast I will requite it, and from humankind, from every man's brother, I will requite human life. He who sheds human blood by humans his blood shall be shed, for in the image of God He made humankind. As for you, be fruitful and multiply, swarm through the earth, and hold sway over it (Alter).

GENESIS 9:3-7 - HEBREW

[3] *kol-remes asher hu-chai l'khem yih'yeh l'okhlah k'yereq esev natatti l'khem et-kol*

[4] *akh-basar b'nafsho damo lo tokhelu*

[5] *v'akh et-dim'khem l'nafshotekhem edrosh m'yad kol-chayah edreshennu u'm'yad ha'adam m'yad ish achiyv edrosh et-nefesh ha'adam*

[6] *shofekh dam ha'adam b'adam damo yishafekh ki b'tzelem Elohim asah et-ha'adam*

[7] *v'atem p'ru u'revu shir'tzu b'erez u'revu-ba*

[3] כָּל־רֶמֶשׂ אֲשֶׁר הוּא־חַי לָכֶם יִהְיֶה לְאֹכְלָהּ כִּי־רֶקַע עֵשֶׂב נָתַתִּי לָכֶם אֶת־כָּל

[4] אֶךְ־בָּשָׂר בְּנַפְשׁוֹ דָּמוֹ לֹא תֹאכְלוּ

[5] וְאֶךְ אֶת־דַּמְכֶם לְנַפְשׁוֹתֵיכֶם אֲדַרְשׁ מִיַּד כָּל־חַיָּה אֲדַרְשֶׁנּוּ וּמִיַּד הָאָדָם מִיַּד אִישׁ אָחִיו אֲדַרְשׁ אֶת־נַפְשׁ הָאָדָם

[6] שֹׁפֵךְ דָּם הָאָדָם בְּאָדָם דָּמוֹ יִשְׁפֹךְ כִּי בְצֶלֶם אֱלֹהִים עָשָׂה אֶת־הָאָדָם

[7] וְאַתֶּם פְּרוּ וּרְבוּ שִׂרְצוּ בָאָרֶץ וּרְבוּ־בָהּ

The statements made by God in Genesis 9:3-7 are delivered after the Flood is completed, and humanity now has to rebuild itself. In most Messianic examinations of *Noach* (Genesis 6:9-11:32), we often overlook what is being said here, for a variety of reasons. Vegetarian man is now told by the Creator that he is allowed to eat meat, something previously prohibited, with some specific stipulations on what to do with animal blood. Much of our avoidance of this section is likely because many Christians today use Genesis 9:3-7 as a proof text to show that while Noah and his family were allowed to eat meat, they seem to be told to eat the meat of any animal, which would presumably include those that would later be specifically classified “unclean.” It is thus asserted that the laws of *kashrut* given in Leviticus 11 and Deuteronomy 14 were only temporary instructions for Ancient Israel that Noah did not have to follow.

Is this really what is asserted in Genesis 9:3-7, or is there more at work in the text that may be alluding us? What does this part of the early Genesis story tell us about animals for food, human beings, and the need to respect blood? **Why did God extend permission for people to eat meat?**

This section of Genesis has obvious significance for Messianics today who believe in the continuance of the kosher dietary laws (1 Peter 1:15-16; cf. Leviticus 11:44ff) as a part of the New Covenant (Jeremiah 31:31-33; Hebrews 8:8-12), but what else might it teach us? How important is it for us to engage with a variety of opinions—across the theological spectrum—to gain a fuller picture of what might be communicated here?

“Every moving thing shall be food”

[3] Every moving thing that is alive shall be food for you; I give all to you, as *I gave* the green plant.

There is an undeniable connection between Genesis 9:3-7 and previous instruction given by God in Genesis 1, as man prepares to live again on Earth as the gross evil that had perpetuated has been eradicated by the Flood. Noah and company, and by extension all humanity (Heb. *l'khem...l'khem*, לָכֶם...לָכֶם) is told, “Everything that lives and moves shall be food for you” (NIV). Previously, Adam and Eve had only been told that they were allowed to eat *kol-esev* (כָּל-עֵשֶׂב), the green plant (1:28) or “green grasses” (NJPS), but now all meat would seem to be available for human consumption.

Kol-remes asher hu-chai (כָּל-רֶמֶשׁ אֲשֶׁר הוּא-חַי) is invariably rendered as “every moving thing that is alive” (NASU) or “Every creature that lives and moves” (NEB). J.H. Hertz indicates his view of how “The term is here used in a wide sense to include beast, fish and fowl.”¹ The Septuagint translators took it to mean *pan herpeton* (πᾶν ἑρπετόν) or “every reptile” (LXE). So for many, the conclusion is fairly obvious: Noah was permitted by God to eat *any kind* of meat he wanted. This would include things that were later considered “unclean” in the Torah.

One fact does allude many readers, and that is how Noah was not just called to take two of every animal, a male and female, that would be affected by the Flood (Genesis 6:19-20). Noah was also instructed to take seven pairs of every clean animal (Genesis 7:2). The latter were to be used for the sacrifices that he would offer to the Lord once the waters had receded (Genesis 8:20). From a textual standpoint, it could be argued that Noah had an understanding of clean and unclean animals, with the seven pairs of clean animals to be used for sacrificing. Such *excess animals* would also be those Noah could have eaten once the prohibition upon eating meat had been lifted, as the other animals would need to have begun repopulating themselves immediately in the wake of a significant ecological disaster.

Those of us who hold to principal Mosaic authorship of Genesis have it very easy in drawing this interpretation, because we see all of the information as originating from the same source. The critical tradition, in contrast, confuses everything for the reader.² Believing the Pentateuch to be a series of disparate sources compiled after the Babylonian exile, liberal readers see that “clean and unclean” has obviously been read back into the story of the Flood,³ in this case probably from J or the so-called Yahwistic writer. *IDB* summarizes,

“According to priestly tradition the main body of food laws was given by divine revelation during the Mosaic period (Lev. 11; Deut. 14:3-21). In contrast to the priestly theory, the Yahwist represented the distinction between clean and unclean animals as existing in the time of Noah (Gen. 7:2, 8; 8:20).”⁴

Most evangelical Christian readers of Genesis 9:3-7 adhere to Mosaic authorship of the Torah, and would disagree with the view that J interjected concepts of “clean and unclean”—that supposedly came later—back into the account of the Flood. But even though such conservative readers of Genesis hold to some kind of Mosaic involvement in Genesis, they will often fall prey to the liberal conclusions. It really does not matter that Noah had seven pairs of clean animals with him on the ark, nor does it matter that those would be the animals that he would sacrifice

¹ J.H. Hertz, ed., *Pentateuch & Haftorahs* (London: Soncino, 1960), 32.

² Consult the editor's entry for the Book of Genesis in *A Survey of the Tanach for the Practical Messianic* for an explanation of liberal views surrounding its composition.

³ Do note that the critical tradition also widely advocates that the ancient Mesopotamian *Epic of Gilgamesh* is believed to have been adopted and changed by the Jewish exiles in Babylon, becoming the Biblical account of Noah and the Flood, and not being authentic to Ancient Israel.

For a further discussion, consult the editor's article “Encountering Mythology: A Case Study from the Flood Narratives.”

⁴ L.E. Toombs, “Clean and unclean,” in George Buttrick, ed. et. al., *The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible*, 4 vols. (Nashville: Abingdon, 1962), 1:645.

and/or eat. God said “every moving thing,” didn’t He? (Question: When God previously said “I have given you every plant...” in Genesis 1:29, did this mean that He expected Adam and Eve to eat poisonous plants that would be harmful?)

The conclusions drawn by John Calvin, interpreting Genesis 9:3-7, need to be considered here. He actually asserted that man was not, after the conclusion of the Flood, allowed to eat meat—but that he was actually *restored* to eat meat. Calvin argued, “God here does not bestow on men more than he had previously given, but only restored what had been taken away, that they might again enter on the possession of those good things from which they had been excluded.”⁵ The fear that animals were to have for the human race (Genesis 9:2) was something that had been lost. As a proof for this, Calvin cites Romans 14:14 as evidence that people can eat whatever meats they want, concurrent with 1 Timothy 4:5.⁶ His conclusion regarding the distinctions of clean and unclean is “that exception was but temporary, [and] is here passed over by Moses.”⁷ For him, it is not sufficiently obvious in the text that the animals permitted to be eaten by Noah are among those seven pairs of clean animals taken onto the ark. Any discussion regarding *kashrut* law here is periphery at best.

While it is easy to draw the conclusion that Noah and company were permitted by God to eat all kinds of meat, some interpreters are bit more cautious and meticulous in their observations. Gordon J. Wenham observes, “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 just 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 (7:2,8; 8:20).”⁸ Even if one holds to a critical view of the Torah’s composition, as does Wenham, he still recognizes that a reader must interpret the text in its final form. So in this case, one cannot avoid that “clean and unclean” is no peripheral issue in God’s granting permission to Noah to eat meat.⁹

We need not overlook the fact that a specific category of animal was given permission by God for Noah to eat: *kol remes* (כָּל־רֶמֶשׂ). While *remes* (רֶמֶשׂ) is often defined as “everything that moves and lives” (*HALOT*),¹⁰ more might need to be considered. John H. Walton makes some very careful observations that we need to pay close attention to:

“The noun (*remes*) and the associated verb (*rms*) 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...”¹¹

These are some very interesting statements, as it could suggest that *remes* is a category that God specifically wanted Noah and company to eat from, perhaps different from those clean animals he had taken on the ark to later sacrifice. Walton sees a connection between *remes* and the Akkadian cognate *nammashthu*, “which typically refers to wild animals that travel in herds...they

⁵ John Calvin: *Genesis*, trans. and ed. John King (Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth Trust, 1975), 291.

⁶ It must be immediately noted that the common Greek term employed for unclean, *akathartos* (ἀκάθαρτος), is not what is used in Romans 14:14. Instead, *koinos* (κοινός), “common,” is employed.

Likewise, the issue of 1 Timothy 4:5 regards vegetarianism against eating meat, coupled with forced celibacy, necessitating the interpreter to see that some kind of ancient ascetism is in view.

For a further explanation, consult the editor’s article “To Eat or Not to Eat?”

⁷ Calvin, 293.

⁸ Gordon J. Wenham, *Word Biblical Commentary: Genesis 1-15*, Vol 1 (Dallas: Word Incorporated, 1987), pp 192-193.

⁹ I do note Wenham’s conclusion: “the food laws certainly view the prohibition of the consumption of blood as more important than not eating unclean animals” (p 193).

¹⁰ Ludwig Koehler and Walter Baumgartner, eds., *The Hebrew & Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament*, 2 vols. (Leiden, the Netherlands: Brill, 2001), 2:1246.

¹¹ John H. Walton’s, *The NIV Application Commentary: Genesis* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2001), pp 341-342. *Remes* appears in: Genesis 1:24-26; 6:7, 20; 7:14, 23; 8:19.

are distinct from wild animals that hunt or scavenge.”¹² He makes reference to the Sumerian *Epic of Gilgamesh*, which speaks of “The small wild creatures of the plains [who] were glad of the water, and Enkidu with them, who ate grass with the gazelle and was born in the hills.”¹³ His conclusion of *remes* is that “These animals were typically characterized as being the prey of hunters and predatory beasts,”¹⁴ concurring with God’s word to Noah, “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 [ramas, רָמַשׁ] on the ground**” (Genesis 9:2). V. 3 issues specific permission, then, for Noah and company to go out and hunt animals for food.

Interestingly enough, the animals that Walton lists that would principally fall into this *remes* category include “wild cattle, antelope, fallow deer, gazelle, and ibex.”¹⁵ These are all animals considered clean on the specific food lists of Leviticus 11 and Deuteronomy 14. His view is that “domesticated plants and animals were always considered legitimate sources of food, while permission was granted for...hunting animals for food (9:5).”¹⁶ There seems to be no major problem here between the laws of *kashrut* and Noah being allowed to eat *remes*. The *remes* animals would have been clean animals, but many would have needed to be hunted and/or tamed in order to actually be eaten. The fear that such animals would have for humans would come as they were hunted for food, and/or hoarded and domesticated for food. Noah just needed approval from God to go out and “get them.”

“You shall not eat flesh...with its blood”

[4] Only you shall not eat flesh with its life, *that is*, its blood. [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.

Even though humanity has now been granted formal permission from God to eat meat, it is not as though people can just eat meat however they want. Animals, after all, have to die in order for human beings to live. V. 4 issues the prohibition, “you must not eat meat that has its lifeblood still in it” (NIV). The Torah and Tanach later specify how blood is to be drained from meat that is eaten (Leviticus 3:17; 7:26-27; 19:26; Deuteronomy 12:16-24; 1 Samuel 14:32-34). Wenham indicates, “It is easy to see why blood is identified with life...a beating heart and a strong pulse are the clearest evidence of life.”¹⁷

The Hebrew clause *basar b'nafsho damo* (בָּשָׂר בְּנַפְשׁוֹ דָּמוֹ) is not an easy one to translate (among many that appear in the early chapters of Genesis),¹⁸ appearing in some versions as “with its soul, its blood” (v. 4, ATS) or “life-blood” (NJPS). It is important for the reader to remember that *nefesh* (נֶפֶשׁ) has a wide variety of meanings in the Tanach and has considerable flexibility, with the *CHALOT* lexicon actually providing **nine different definitions** and applications available for the interpreter to pick.¹⁹ The one that obviously concerns us here would be “life” (although in

¹² Ibid., 342.

See also William White, “remes,” in R. Laird Harris, Gleason L. Archer, Jr., and Bruce K. Waltke, eds., *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament*, 2 vols (Chicago: Moody Press, 1980), 2:850-851.

¹³ N.K. Sandars, *The Epic of Gilgamesh* (London: Penguin Books, 1972), 64.

¹⁴ Walton, 342.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Ibid., 343.

¹⁷ Wenham, 193.

¹⁸ The controversy as to how an interpreter should properly view *nefesh* in the opening chapters of Genesis is notably not as pronounced as how one should properly view *yom* (יּוֹם) or “day,” which in many cases in the Hebrew Scriptures can mean a “division of time” (Francis Brown, S.R. Driver, and Charles A. Briggs, *Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament* [Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1979], 398) with no specified length.

¹⁹ These include: “throat,” “neck,” “breath,” “living being,” “man, men, person, people,” “personality, individuality,” “life,” “soul” as seat & support of feelings & sensations,” and “someone dead” (William L. Holladay, ed., *A Concise Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament* [Leiden, the Netherlands: E.J. Brill, 1988], pp 242-243).

many cases in describing people *nefesh* simply means “person”). The blood that the heart pumps throughout the body of an animal gives the animal life, and God, who is the originator of such life, wants the human person who eats the animal to be aware of the fact that the animal’s life-force has had to be drained out in order that he or she might eat.

A grammatical point is made in v. 4 by Umberto Cassuto: “The proposition *Bēth* signifies here *with*...the meaning being; together *with its soul*, with the element of life therein, which is blood.”²⁰ In his commentary, Victor P. Hamilton renders the clause *basar b'nafsho damo* as “flesh together with its lifeblood.”²¹ A person who eats meat cannot eat them both. If one eats meat with blood still in it, the meat would still be, to some degree, considered “alive.” In order to eat animal flesh, that which animated such flesh cannot be consumed.

In the Rabbinic tradition, Genesis 9:4 was applied to eating the limb of a living animal, a principle known as *ever min ha'chai* (אֶבֶר מִן הַחַי).²² This is rightly considered by Hertz to be “a barbarous practice common among primitive races.”²³ This gave rise to the Jewish laws of *shechitah* or ritual animal slaughter, whereby as much blood as possible is removed from meat before it can be eaten. This is not at all an inappropriate application, but IVPBBC takes a slightly different view,

“The prohibition does not require that no blood at all be consumed, but only that the blood must be drained. The draining of the blood before eating the meat was a way of returning the life force of the animal to the God who gave it life. This offers recognition that they have taken the life with permission and are taking of God’s bounty as his guests.”²⁴

This commentary is right to assert that by draining the blood, people must recognize that by eating animals they are eating of God’s bounty. But it is not difficult to assume that a prohibition on eating blood is directly seen in Genesis 9:4. Leviticus 17:13 will later specify, “when any man from the sons of Israel, or from the aliens who sojourn among them, in hunting catches a beast or a bird which may be eaten, he shall pour out its blood and cover it with earth.” Perhaps Genesis did not specify such a ritual, but the blood of an animal eaten was to be put aside and not touched as it contained its life force. Nahum M. Sarna explains,

“[P]opular thought had it that one could renew or reinforce one’s vitality through its absorption of blood. For this reason, blood played an important role of the cults of the dead in the ancient world. In the Torah, however, precisely because blood is the symbol of life, it belongs to God alone, as does life itself. The legislation contained in the present verse has no known analogy in the ancient Near East.”²⁵

It is pretty impossible to remove *all* traces of blood from meat that has been butchered, even when one purchases meat from an authorized kosher market following rigid procedures. Presumably, though, because most meat dishes are cooked, the cooking process is responsible for removing other trace amounts of blood within the meat. The principal issue in Genesis 9:4 is for Noah and his family to recognize that if they eat an animal, its blood must be shed for them to eat of its flesh. Even today in the secular, mass marketed meat industry in America, most meat sold at supermarkets already has a great deal of its blood removed. While those of us who have accepted a Biblical worldview can appreciate God’s instruction (whether we observe any of the kosher laws or not), not all people throughout history have followed such an obvious mandate. The Jerusalem Council thought it necessary that the new, non-Jewish Believers immediately abstain from blood

²⁰ Umberto Cassuto, *A Commentary on the Book of Genesis: From Noah to Abraham* (Jerusalem: Hebrew University Magnes Press, 1964), 126.

²¹ Victor P. Hamilton, *New International Commentary on the Old Testament: The Book of Genesis, Chapters 1-17* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990), 311.

²² Nahum M. Sarna, *JPS Torah Commentary: Genesis* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1989), pp 60-61; Nosson Scherman, ed., et. al., *The ArtScroll Chumash, Stone Edition*, 5th ed. (Brooklyn: Mesorah Publications, 2000), 41.

²³ Hertz, 32.

²⁴ John H. Walton, Victor H. Matthews, and Mark W. Chavalas, *The IVP Bible Background Commentary: Old Testament* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2000), 39.

²⁵ Sarna, 61.

if they desired to fellowship with Jewish Believers (Acts 15:20, 29), indicating that in the Greco-Roman culture of the Mediterranean, blood may have played a role in someone's diet and/or religious rituals.²⁶

Many interpreters have appreciated the instruction of v. 4 and God's requirement that human beings respect the blood of the animals they eat. Calvin recognized how "if it be a savage and barbarous thing to devour lives, or to swallow down living flesh, men betray their brutality by eating blood."²⁷ Eating both blood and flesh is unacceptable within such a framework, as God allows for flesh, *and not blood*, to be consumed. But Calvin had to insist, though, "we must remember, that this restriction was part of the old law."²⁸ Even in light of the Jerusalem Council prohibiting the new, non-Jewish Believers from consuming blood, Calvin concluded, "the apostles, in commanding the Gentiles to observe this rite, [did so] for a short time."²⁹ It was his view, and consequently the view of many Christians today, that the Jerusalem Council requirements were only necessary for table fellowships as long as Jewish Believers were the majority in the early *ekklēsia*.

The severity of not consuming animal blood is emphasized in v. 5, as people are asked to consider how sacred their own lives are: "But for your own life-blood I will require a reckoning: I will require it of every beast; of man, too, will I require a reckoning for human life, of every man for that of his fellow man!" (NJPS). If people want to eat meat, then that is acceptable as long as certain guidelines are followed. Yet in killing animals for food they are to not all of a sudden get the idea that the lives of their fellow human beings are meaningless.

God says *v'akh et-dim'khem l'nafshotekhem edrosh* (וְאַךְ אֶת־דַּמְכֶם לְנַפְשׁוֹתֵיכֶם אֲדַרֵּשׁ), "However, your blood which belongs to your souls I will demand" (v. 5, ATS). If a person fails to respect the blood that gives an animal life, then the blood that provides a human being on Earth with his or her life experience may also be required. Animals who kill people are going to be held accountable, so much so that later in Exodus 21:28-32 they were to be put to death. So if God requires that animals who kill human beings be put to death, what might God require of human beings who *murder* other human beings?

"Whoever sheds man's blood..."

[6] Whoever sheds man's blood, by man his blood shall be shed, for in the image of God He made man. [7] As for you, be fruitful and multiply; populate the earth abundantly and multiply in it.

The severity of how important human life is, is expressed in v. 6. God decrees, "Whoever sheds the blood of a human, by a human shall that person's blood be shed; for in his own image God made humankind" (NRSV). Why was this important for God to express? Allen P. Ross explains, "Because of the Flood's destruction of life people might begin to think that God holds life cheap and assume that taking life is a small matter."³⁰ The Flood, in addition to wiping out sinful humanity (save Noah and seven other persons), also killed the animals associated with humanity. So, if God is going to place specific requirements on killing animals for food (v. 4), animals that were made as a part of His Creation and must be respected, **then it must be even more emphasized that a human being—the pinnacle of His Creation—must be respected!**

Even while he holds to a source critical view of the Pentateuch, one cannot escape the sentiments of truth seen in the comments of Walter Brueggemann:

²⁶ For a further discussion of this, and related controversies, consult the editor's commentary *Acts 15 for the Practical Messianic* (forthcoming 2009).

²⁷ Calvin, 293.

²⁸ *Ibid.*

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 294.

³⁰ Allen P. Ross, "Genesis," in John F. Walvoord and Roy B. Zuck, eds., *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: Old Testament* (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1985), 40.

“An old statement on blood has now been transformed into an affirmation about human life and human worth. This decree urges human enhancement and the valuing of human persons. In this first post-flood decree of creation, the sanctity of human life is established against every ideology and every force which would cheapen or diminish life.”³¹

V. 6 is clear to state *b'tzelem Elohim asah et-ha'adam* (בְּצֶלֶם אֱלֹהִים עָשָׂה אֱת־הָאָדָם), a reaffirmation of Genesis 1:26-27. In spite of Seth being made after fallen Adam's image (Genesis 5:3), man still maintains God's image even though sin has entered in. Because a human being is made in God's image, it thus incumbent upon a man or woman to act like the Creator, rather than act like an animal. Being made in God's image brings with it a serious responsibility to respect others *made in that same image*. Hamilton explains, “man's divine creation should be a deterrent to criminal behavior. There is no evidence here that sin has effaced the divine image. It is still resident in post-Flood, post-paradise man.”³² God made man and woman in His image to “rule over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the sky and over the cattle and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth” (Genesis 1:26). Psalm 8 further describes what being made in God's image is all about:

“O LORD, our Lord, How majestic is Your name in all the earth, who have displayed Your splendor above the heavens! From the mouth of infants and nursing babes You have established strength because of Your adversaries, to make the enemy and the revengeful cease. When I consider Your heavens, the work of Your fingers, the moon and the stars, which You have ordained; **what is man that You take thought of him, and the son of man that You care for him? Yet You have made him a little lower than God, and You crown him with glory and majesty!** You make him to rule over the works of Your hands; You have put all things under his feet, all sheep and oxen, and also the beasts of the field, the birds of the heavens and the fish of the sea, whatever passes through the paths of the seas. O LORD, our Lord, how majestic is Your name in all the earth!”

The human race (Heb. *ha'adam*) is unique among all of God's creations, because people are actually made in His image. The connections between Genesis 1:26-27 and 9:6 and Psalm 8 all make it clear that God made man and woman in His image so that they would be able to rule with Him. While it is true that humans were made at a higher level than animals, the Psalmist explains it a very different way: “You have made him a little lower than God” (Psalm 8:5, NASU). Even with the Hebrew clause *m'at m'Elohim* (מֵאֵת מֵאֱלֹהִים) rendered in the Greek LXX as *brachu...par aggelous* (βραχύ...παρ' ἀγγέλους), “a little less than angels” (LXE), the lot of humanity is not cast with the animal kingdom **but instead** with the Heavenly host—“You made him a little lower than the heavenly beings” (NIV). The Psalmist **did not assert** that man was made “a little higher than the animals” via some kind of theistic evolution.³³

How does this involve Noah being allowed to eat meat, and also what we see here about God requiring a reckoning from a person who murders another? Genesis 9:2 has said that the animals would dread or fear their human masters, likely because they would find themselves being hunted and/or hoarded for their meat. God requires that their blood be removed before eating their flesh, as a reminder for people to respect them. And even more so, because the human being is made in His image—a **person must be shown even greater respect** as an indication that men and women are reflecting the good character of their Creator. *Those who indiscriminately kill other people will have to pay for their crimes*. It may be noted that Talmudic tradition actually cites v. 6 as a support text to prohibit abortion:

“In the name of R. Ishmael it is said, ‘He is put to death even for the murder of an embryo.’ *What is the scriptural basis of the view of R. Ishmael?* Since it is written, ‘Whoever sheds the blood of a man within a man [B'DM], his blood shall be shed’ (Gen. 9: 6). What sort of ‘man’ is

³¹ Walter Brueggemann, *Interpretation, a Bible commentary for teaching and preaching: Genesis* (Atlanta: John Knox, 1982), 83.

³² Hamilton, 315.

³³ For an evaluation of the various views, consult J.P. Moreland and John Mark Reynolds, eds., *Three Views of Creation and Evolution* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1999).

located ‘within a “man”?’ One must say it is the embryo in the mother’s womb” (b.*Sanhedrin* 57b).³⁴

Most significantly for the larger scope of the Scriptures, v. 6 lays forward the groundwork for capital punishment (Exodus 21:12-14; Numbers 35:16-32). The instruction in Numbers 35:31 is clear: “you shall not take ransom for the life of a murderer who is guilty of death, but he shall surely be put to death.” A human being who kills another human being shows contempt for God (Proverbs 14:31; 17:5; James 3:9).

Some have tried to argue that God is the only One who takes care of the punishing of those who murder, and not human courts or tribunals. This is based in an inappropriate stretch of the clause *b’adam damo yishafekh* (בְּאָדָם דָּמוֹ יִשְׁחָפֵךְ). As Hamilton explains, “The weakness of this interpretation is that it ascribes to the proposition *b’* an usual meaning when one of the standard uses of *b’* makes sense in the verse...The penalty for shedding blood may be exacted either by God (v. 5) or by man (v. 6).”³⁵

One cannot blame some interpreters of Genesis 9:6 of wanting the sole responsibility of taking a person’s life to be placed on God. God, after all, was responsible for the judgment of the Flood. Furthermore, as Believers in Messiah Yeshua, we all affirm that via His sacrificial work at Golgotha (Calvary), “the certificate of debt consisting of decrees against us, which was hostile to us...He has taken it out of the way, having nailed it to the cross” (Colossians 2:14). This would comprise the death penalty pronounced against sinners in the Torah, and because such penalties have been atoned for via the Son of God (cf. Romans 5:6-8; 8:3), there has now been a *nomou metathesis* (νόμου μετάθεσις) or a “transformation of *Torah*” (Hebrews 7:12, CJB) enacted. Consider how the Torah prescribes the death penalty for those who commit a variety sexually immoral acts (Leviticus 20), yet Paul’s word to the Believers in Corinth was not for them to execute such sinners, but instead to eject them from the assembly:

“I have decided to deliver such a one to Satan for the destruction of his flesh, so that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Yeshua” (1 Corinthians 5:5).

Here is an example of the “transformation of *Torah*” in action. Yeshua by His sacrificial work has taken away the death penalty of the sexually immoral. Yet, the sexually immoral person must still be ejected from the *ekklēsia* as an appropriate punishment. In this case, he will inevitably succumb to something physical that will cause him to die. Perhaps as his flesh suffers from the consequences of the sin, the person may still repent and be saved.

As severe as sins such as sexual immorality may be, **the most heinous of all sins is murder.** The fact that a death penalty for murder is proscribed very early on in the Torah—before the Ten Commandments are given at Mount Sinai—draws many, including myself, to conclude that capital punishment for murderers is a Creation ordinance that remains true in spite of Yeshua’s atoning work on the cross. History has often shown that since Yeshua’s sacrifice, whenever religious authorities try to enact capital punishment for crimes *other than murder*, severe problems can ensue. The failures of the English Reformation should immediately come to our minds, as when Catholic or Protestant monarchs came to power, many people were slaughtered for no good cause. People were often falsely accused of treason and unjustifiably executed.

While varied Christian traditions have wrestled with the issue of capital punishment, it is also unavoidable that the Rabbinic tradition has equally wrestled with it. The Mishnah details, “A Sanhedrin which imposes the death penalty once in seven years is called murderous. R. Eleazar b. Azariah says, ‘Once in seventy years.’ R. Tarfon and R. Aqiba say, ‘If we were on a sanhedrin, no one would ever be put to death.’ Rabban Simeon b. Gamaliel says, ‘So they would multiply the number of murderers in Israel’” (m.*Makkot* 1:10).³⁶ Here, we can see the sentiments of some

³⁴ *The Babylonian Talmud: A Translation and Commentary*. MS Windows XP. Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2005. CD-ROM.

³⁵ Hamilton, 315.

³⁶ Jacob Neusner, trans., *The Mishnah: A New Translation* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1988), 612.

Rabbis of wanting to avoid having to enact capital punishment, but the necessity of it being used would come to eliminate murderers from the Jewish community.

Sarna further describes, “It should be noted that, unlike the law collections of the ancient Near East, the Bible never imposes the death penalty for crimes against the property of one’s fellow.”³⁷

The contrast with murder being present in society is a prolific abundance of life. God says, “And you, be fruitful and multiply, bring forth abundantly on the earth and multiply in it” (v. 7, RSV). God’s Creation is still *tov meod* (טוֹב מְאֹד) or “very good” (Genesis 1:31), in spite of sin being present and it not being quite “perfect.” God still wants people to enjoy this planet that He has made, as He says *u’revu-ba* (וַרְבִּיבוּ), “and multiply in it.”

Many interpreters see the beginnings of human government in v. 7, to be clearly compared against the chaos and murder that required God to send the Flood (Genesis 6:5-6, 11-12). The LXX actually adds the clause *kai plēthunesthe ep autēs* (καὶ πληθύνεσθε ἐπ’ αὐτῆς), “and have dominion over it” (LXE), as in the passive voice the verb *plēthunō* (πληθύνω) can mean “to be in the majority, to prevail” (LS).³⁸ James Montgomery Boice makes an entire sermon out of Genesis 9:3-7 about the significance of government (even though he does not address the issue of man being allowed to eat meat).³⁹

Why Meat?

When examining Genesis 9:3-7, it is clear that prior to the Flood humanity was only allowed to eat fruits and vegetables, but now people can eat meat with Divine approval. Specific permission was given to go out and hunt *remes* (v. 3), various types of game that would be considered clean, but would have needed to be hoarded and domesticated. The caveat which God issues is that if meat is eaten, then the lifeblood of the animals is to be drained (v. 4). It is to remind people of the sanctity of their own human lives (v. 5), as a person who murders another is to be punished (v. 6), as God intends for life on Earth to be something blessed (v. 7).

But is there something that we have missed in our examination of Genesis 9:3-7? **Why is it that only after the Flood that man is given permission by the Creator to eat meat?** Why, even with the prior understanding of clean and unclean (Genesis 7:2), could Noah and company not have been allowed to eat meat?

One Rabbinic tradition reflected in the *ArtScroll Chumash* says, “Had it not been for the righteousness of Noah, no life would have survived the Flood.”⁴⁰ This view offers Psalm 128:2 as support: “When you shall eat of the fruit of your hands, you will be happy and it will be well with you.” Noah and company being allowed to eat meat is a reward from the Creator for their maintenance of the animals onboard the ark. This view is followed by Cassuto, who summarizes, “He grants Noah and his sons permission to eat the flesh of all living creatures...since they rescued the living creatures in their ark and made the continued life of their kinds possible in the future, and thus became, as it were, partners of the Creator in the creation of the life of these species.”⁴¹

Another view of man being allowed to eat meat is that the Flood inaugurated significant ecological changes, necessitating a change in diet. It is very true that once Noah and company exited the ark that they would find themselves in the middle of a significant floodplain (Genesis 8:13-19). The stores they brought on board the ark to feed the animals and themselves would eventually expire, and God would certainly not want the only eight humans alive to starve to death. It would seem most likely that the “ecological changes,” though, have less to do with the planet as a whole, and more to do with the immediate aftermath of the Flood. Animal meat

³⁷ Sarna, 62.

³⁸ H.G. Lidell and R. Scott, *An Intermediate Greek-English Lexicon* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994), 646.

³⁹ James Montgomery Boice, *Genesis: An Expository Commentary*, Vol 1 (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1998), pp 380-386.

⁴⁰ Scherman, 41.

⁴¹ Cassuto, 126.

among the seven pairs of clean animals could have been a way to prolong life while Noah and company could begin a planting and grow crops.

A third, and perhaps the most compelling view as to why God extended permission for humanity to eat meat, may be seen in an interpretation of Genesis 6:11, “Now the earth was corrupt in the sight of God, and the earth was filled with violence,” and God’s word that man’s “days shall be one hundred and twenty years” (Genesis 6:3). If one looks at the genealogy chart of Genesis 5, one will see that the selection of ten anti-Diluvians listed lived extremely long. It makes little or no sense for Twenty-First Century people as to how anyone could ever live almost a millennium. However, as Creationist author Hugh Ross describes,

“Vegetarianism perfectly suits the potential longevity of the first humans. Animal tissue contains between ten and ten thousand times the concentration of heavy elements that plant material contains. This difference sounds drastic, but it poses an insignificant health risk for people living only 120 years or less (the limit God imposed at the time of the Flood). However, the difference is by no means trivial for people living nearly a thousand years.”⁴²

Ross explains that one of the significant reasons God had to send the Flood was for a failure to follow His mandate, “Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth...” (Genesis 1:28). He thinks it is no small fact that “In Genesis 1-9 the text mentions place-names only in the environs of Mesopotamia,” and then later “From Genesis 10 onward, we encounter references (by name or direction) to places beyond Mesopotamia, in fact, to places covering much of the Eastern hemisphere.”⁴³ Failure to move out and separate over the face of the Earth was a major cause of God needing to send the Flood, coupled with the long lifespan of humans. Ross indicates, “The long life spans, of course, favored the spread of violence and murder, for the percentage of the perpetrators rose as more and more victims died, many righteous among them, and as the cycle of revenge escalated.”⁴⁴

People focused on nothing but murderous violence, confined to a small region of the world, able to live almost a thousand years due to a vegetarian diet—is asserted to be *a major cause for the Flood*. It is not difficult to see that once meat is introduced into the human diet, that among the selection of ten post-Diluvians seen in Genesis 11, the lifespan of people begins to significantly decrease. This is not to say that people will not be evil, nor that murder has not happened since, but the introduction of meat into the human diet—even though permitted by God—was likely deliberate so that none of us could (easily) live beyond 120 years.

Messianics who eat meat today already know that God holds us to a high standard. The whole concept of *kashrut* is connected to His holiness. Yet the next time we eat meat, we need to remember that an animal died so that we might continue. Its blood had to be drained. Surely, if God expects us to extend some kind of honor or respect to animals, He expects it even more of the human creatures made in His image. As Believers in Messiah, we are to reign at His side over His redeemed Creation in the eschaton (Hebrews 2:5-8). Admittedly, these are not the normal things that you would probably think about the next time you have a hamburger!

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Unless otherwise noted, Scripture quotations are from the *New American Standard, Updated Edition* (NASU), © 1995, published by The Lockman Foundation.

⁴² Hugh Ross, *The Genesis Question: Scientific Advances and the Accuracy of Genesis*, second expanded edition (Colorado Springs: NavPress, 2001), 71.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 148.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 142.