

Was Jesus a Vegetarian?

An advertising campaign by People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals (PETA) claims that the world started as vegetarian and remains that way. Support their argument by claiming that Jesus was a vegetarian. Their reasoning seems to be a belief that Jesus was an Essene. Some of that sect were against the killing and eating of animals. They further claim that there is no mention of Jesus eating meat in the bible and that throwing the money changers out of the temple was in protest over the selling and sacrifices of animals. The biblical record disapproves of these claims.

The scriptures teach that Jesus was a Jew who lived under the Law of Moses. He is confirmed to have lived a sinless life (2 Corinthians 5:21; Hebrews 4:15). Therefore, He must have obeyed every aspect of that law. Every Israelite was to eat the Passover Feast (Exodus 12:47), which required everyone to eat roasted lamb (Exodus 12:3-4). On three recorded occasions, Jesus participated in the feast. (1) When He was twelve years old (Luke 2:41), (2) while teaching in Jerusalem (John 2:23), and (3) while preparing to offer Himself as the ultimate Passover sacrifice (Matthew 26:17-19). If Jesus did not eat the Passover lamb, He would have violated the Law and been declared an unclean sinner (Exodus 12:8-10; Numbers 9:12). Jesus instructed the disciples to prepare the lamb (Luke 22:7-8), and He did eat the Passover (Luke 22:14-16).

Some dieters mention the ascetic, self-denial, habits of the Essenes and argue that Jesus denied Himself meats. First, God specified that His people were not to eat certain meats. They could eat Beef, lamb, goat, and many fowl and fish with provisions. An Israelite could never eat the fat and blood. *"It is a perpetual statute throughout your generations in all your dwellings: you shall not eat any fat or any blood"* (Leviticus 3:17). In the New Testament, the only restrictions are found in Acts 15:20, *"abstain from things contaminated by idols and from fornication and from what is strangled and from the blood."* The Mosaic Law allowed for the eating of various kinds of meat. Leviticus 11 details which animals Israel could and could not eat. Moses, in (Deuteronomy 14) repeats and explains these again just before Israel enters the Promised Land. Therefore, Jesus would not violate the Law of Moses by eating any of these. Jesus would, however, violate the Law by not eating those meats commanded during acts of worship.

Further, there is no mention of the Essenes or their ascetic practices in the New Testament. Jesus ate fish (Luke 24:42-43) as well as lamb. He miraculously fed fish to 5000 people in Matthew 14 and 4000 in Matthew 15. Jesus also promoted the catching of fish for food (John 12) and ate with them. As for cleansing the temple by throwing the money changers out, He did this twice. At the beginning of His work in Judea, (John 2:14-15) and again near the end of His earthly ministry, (Matthew 21:12; Mark 11:15). Both instances were because the moneychangers made the temple a place to cheat the worshipers in the place of worship.

We learn from Genesis that the first animals killed because of man's sin occurred when God made clothes for Adam and Eve (Genesis 3:21). The first animal killed by man for sacrifice was by Able (Genesis 4:4). God gave instructions to Noah for eating meat. *"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"* (Genesis 9:3-4). In the New Testament, a sampling of these living creatures demonstrated to Peter that we must not reject what God has set aside for our nourishment (Acts 10:9-16). Christ's death removed the Law of Moses, and its restrictions. Under the new covenant, we can eat any meat we desire except blood and animals killed by strangulation, because the blood remains in them (Acts 15:20).

God commanded Peter to kill and eat from a selection that is now approved in Acts 10:9-16. Paul says in 1 Corinthians 10:25-26, *"Eat anything that is sold in the meat market without asking questions for conscience's sake; for the earth is the Lord's, and all it contains."* And Paul writes to Timothy, *"But the Spirit explicitly says that in later times some will fall away from the faith, paying attention to deceitful spirits and doctrines of demons, by means of the hypocrisy of liars seared in their own conscience as with a branding iron, men who forbid marriage and advocate abstaining from foods which God has created to be gratefully shared in by those who believe and know the truth. For everything created by God is good, and nothing is to be rejected if it is received with gratitude; for it is sanctified by means of the word of God and prayer"* (1 Timothy 4:4-5).

God has blessed us with everything needed for our physical nourishment. We must eat a balanced diet to grow physically so that we can do the spiritual *"works prepared for us to walk in"* (Ephesians 2:10).