

An Analysis of Healthy Diet in *Holy Bible*

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Abstract: *Holy Bible* has a profound influence upon Western ideology and culture. The biblical food rules are also abundant, from which we can also see the diet of ancient Mediterranean residents. This is of great significance to the study of the healthy diet and literature with the increasingly prominent environmental and food safety problems nowadays. The biblical food rules can not only provide ancient dietary wisdom for modern people physically, but also help those in trouble spiritually for mental health.

Keywords: *Holy Bible*; Biblical food rules; Healthy diet.

The *Holy Bible* is the religious scripture of various religions, including Protestantism, Catholicism, Islam, Judaism and so on. The book was written in the 2nd century BC. It vividly records the ethnic, social, political, military and many other aspects of the ancient Middle East. It is also a collection of ancient Hebrew myths, legends, historical stories and literary works. The *Holy Bible* exerts indelible and complex influences on European social life, ideology, cultural customs, historical development, literature and art (Kunin 379). The *Holy Bible* infiltrates western history and culture into its vast literary ocean. It is not only a religious text, but also a rich literary text. As a literary text, its literary identity was formally proposed by British sociologist Matthew Arnold in modern times. Literary works are nothing more than two aspects of structure, one is the form structure, the other is the content structure. In this thesis, the biblical diet content will become the focus of analysis. From the biblical diet, we can understand the ancient Mediterranean people's philosophy of life and its significance to modern society.

The biblical records of diet are also very rich, from which we can also see the diet of ancient Mediterranean residents. The diet thought and the life view embodied in the *Holy Bible* are worth studying. This is of great significance to the study of the healthy diet today. With the increasingly prominent environmental and food safety problems, we should actively learn the ancient recipes beneficial to the physical and mental health of human beings from the *Bible* and use it in the contemporary era, which can have far-reaching enlightenment to the construction of the harmony between the acquisition of food and nature, the balance of diet, and the health of body and mind. This thesis will explore the biblical food rules and their impacts upon healthy diet nowadays.

1 Biblical food rules

According to Jonathan Crane, the writer of *Eating Ethically: Religion and Science for a Better Diet*, eating is a prime example and it is so fundamental to all lives that the *Bible*'s stories of humanity's beginnings include eating. Compared to eating, moral concerns like murder and sexual licentiousness which appear only in the later parts of *Holy Bible*, are all pale in significance (103). What we can tell from Crane's view is that moral issues are to be solved by people only when physical concerns involved in eating are something easy to get right. As we all know, *Holy Bible* starts from stories about how the world and human beings are created by God. Among God's creations, eating has been built to be an ontological concern confronting all people. From the creations of cosmos and human to the Noah chronicles in Genesis, food and eating have consistently been those stories' common thread (Crane 104).

From the perspective of religious belief, the *Bible* holds that God is the source of food, food is the synonym of life, and it is God who gives food to us rather than nature recommended by modern science. In Genesis, God gives people "every seed-bearing plant" on the land (1-30). In Corinthians, people are told to eat and drink and "do it all for the glory of God" (10-31). The *Bible* shows reverence for life by sanctifying food. Food becomes a part of the world and God plays the role of a food provider (Crane 105). The greatest significance of food is to give the postnatal life continuity and to assist God in the creation of human.

1.1 Plants and animals

According to God's creations and rules, all biblical foods in this world are created to have their own eating rules. Vegetation is highly praised by God. The original food, such as plants, originally comes from the soil, and people also come from the soil. Vegetarianism means eating plants from the soil, and people may do the same. If someone is integrated with the soil, he will live a long life, otherwise he will live a short one. Yet for the edibility of different animals, God has made clear regulations. Fresh and normal death are the basic requirements for animal meat. Besides, all these edible and forbidden animals primarily contains creatures from land, air and water. From the *Holy Bible*, land animals which "have cloven hooves and chew their cud" are edible (Kunin 382). Based on this regulation, land animals like cows, deer, and sheep are edible while horses, camels and pigs are forbidden. Actually, animals which chew cud and have cloven hooves are almost herbivores. This is fairly similar to the vegetarian food God worships from the very beginning of the *Bible*. One paradoxical category in land animals is pig which has cloven hooves but does not chew its cud. Potential connection between the edible and the forbidden may exist and there are evidences to prove that pigs are eaten by people in Canaan (Macdonald 32). Contrarily, people in Israel never allow this kind of connection happen and pigs are strictly forbidden there (Kunin 382).

Fins and scales are two requirements for edible water animals, which contains all animals and even insects in fresh water and sea. According to these two requirements, Fish without scales like dolphins and sharks are inedible, and aquatic creatures without fins like loaches and eels are also forbidden. What's more, creatures like shells and squid that have neither fins nor scales are not edible. As for air animals, all bird and insects with wings are permitted. Yet they must not eat meat or carrion, and they must have the ability to fly and hop (Leviticus 11:20–23).

1.2 Blood and wine

In addition to plants and animals, biblical food rules also includes requirements for blood and wine. The *Bible* states that blood is inedible because it contains life. God asks Israelites do not "eat blood, nor shall the alien who resides among you eat blood" (Leviticus 17:11–12). Blood in the *Holy Bible* cannot be eaten since it has unique function for expiation (Biale 10). For instance, the blood that Jesus Christ shed on the cross for human sins redeemed all those who believed in him. Hence, blood shows the unique essence of expiation. For this reason, pious Christians do not eat blood. The most forbidden liquid in the *Bible* must be blood and menstrual blood is the most tabooed one (Fonrobert 24).

In the *Bible*, both fresh and fermented grape juice are called wine. The Mediterranean region is the main subtropical fruit producing area in Europe, rich in citrus, figs and grapes. At that time, the residents of the region had generally drunk wine. The universality of wine also made God realize the importance of drinking taboo. King Lemuel was once told that "it's not for kings to drink wine lest they drink and forget what the law decrees" (Proverbs 31-4). Worried about alcohol addiction, God warns the world to drink carefully through Noah's mistakes after drinking too much. Most of the wine in rituals is used to show people's piety and respect for God (Rosenblum 219).

1.3 Wisdom of processing food

In addition to the strict selection criteria for natural food materials, the *Bible* also records a lot of human wisdom on processing food. As one of the carbohydrates, bread or cake is one of the representatives. Joseph was once told by a baker about his dream of "three baskets of bread" on his head (Genesis 40-16). David gives an Egyptian "a cake of pressed figs and two cakes of raisins" (Samuel 1 30-12). Bread and cakes without yeast are usually mentioned in Exodus. These processed carbohydrates are not only fine in workmanship, but also environmentally friendly in the way they are baked. The fuel used here is human manure or cow manure, which is recorded in Ezekiel. Additionally, most bread and cakes mentioned in the *Bible* are without yeast, and the number of consuming bread and cakes is pretty large. There is a description about a bread as a 390-day food (Ezekiel 4-9). Some bread and cakes can even cure disease. Isaiah once told the king to apply "a poultice of figs to the boil" and promised that he would recover soon (Isaiah 39-21).

2 Healthy diet

The detailed records of plants, meat, blood, red wine and food processing methods from biblical food rules are not only a specific reflection of people's life at that time, but also an important inspiration for today's healthy diet. From the *Bible*, we can tell that the sanctity of food lies in the faith that it is given by God and it can give postnatal life. Therefore, in a certain sense, food means life. The sanctity of food shows people's the reverence for God and life. The biblical food rules are still useful nowadays.

2.1 Food and physical health

Physically speaking, God's wisdom of selecting natural food like animal meat and plants contains a lot of information about healthy diet. The changes in the structure of food in the *Bible* have caused a dramatic change in the life span of people to some extent, which is mainly manifested before and after the flood. Before the flood, the world had no control over food and drink. Before the flood, God ordered Noah to build an ark to preserve the animal species including the edible and the forbidden ones.

After the flood, God allowed people to eat the permitted animals from the ark. Then edible animals which have cloven hooves and chew their cud are permitted to be eaten by people. The average life span before the flood is more than 900 years old while it falls to more than 400 after the flood, and then more than 300 and 200. More than three hundred years after the flood, by the time of Abraham, it was only a hundred years old on average. Another five hundred years later, by the time of Moses, “the length of our days is seventy years or eighty if we have the strength” (Psalm 90-10).

Soon after the flood, the human body and age began to degenerate and decrease rapidly. Since God sees that human beings still do evil, so he lets the long-lived human eat the meat of animals to reduce the life span of doing crimes and evils (Crane 114). Although people have a unique position in the food system, eating other animals means killing life and showing no respect for animal life. From the aspect of nutrition, red meat like beef and mutton from land animals which are edible according to the biblical food rules, has a high fat content and eating too much of them may increase the risk of heart disease (Robenstein 630). However, scaleless fish, which is forbidden by the biblical food rules, contains high cholesterol, which should be avoided by most of the elderly and obese people. This rule has also been confirmed by modern science. To some extent, modern humans violate many taboos in biblical food rules. Some people kill animals and destroy the environment in order to pursue delicious food, which seriously damages the process of harmonious coexistence between man and nature.

For the changes of environment, air, drinking water, sunlight, living conditions and diet before and after the flood, the deterioration of meat and the impact of virus on human body are also closely related. The main change of food structure is that the main food has changed from vegetables to meat, which has greatly changed the life of people. This point has certain enlightenment significance to the problems of unreasonable diet structure, such as hypertension, hyperlipemia, and obesity. Besides, biblical food rules also highlight the importance of fresh and normally-dead animal meat since nutritionist also mentions that if the frightened and strangled animals panic excessively before they die, their bodies will produce a lot of toxins to the body's flesh and blood (Robenstein 640). Out of the respect for life, many slaughterhouses in the modern West will euthanize animals and then cut them. A moderate intake of animal meat every day can not only supply high-quality protein and fat for body, but also promote the development of healthy diet (Robenstein 634).

Like eating meat, eating blood means a cruel deprivation of life. What we can tell from the biblical food rules is that blood not only contains soul, but also saves soul. Until now, many people who believe in the Holy *Bible* deem that eating blood was not only the disrespect to the Israelites, but also blasphemy to all the descendants of Noah (Hanneken 4). In fact, animal blood is rich in protein and trace elements, which can be easily absorbed by human body, and can also play a role in moistening intestines. But in the remote ancient society, the process of eating blood was inevitably mishandled, resulting in bacterial parasitism causing diseases and threatening life. Hence, in consideration of food safety, it is reasonable not to eat blood. It is better to say that God wants human beings to respect life than to say that God forbids human beings to eat blood. Unlike blood, wine has always been prevailing throughout history. Objectively, nutrition shows that regular drinking wine can reduce blood fat and blood sugar, and it has many other effects like strengthening heart and fighting aging. Furthermore, God's taboo on drinking wine also conforms to the concept of modern healthy diet. For modern doctors, wine is regarded as a kind of therapy for both body and mind, and this is consistent with the medicinal value of wine for ancient Greek doctors (Jouanna and Allies 2).

As the most important nutrient for human body, carbohydrate, the *Bible* has also repeatedly mentioned the reasonable eating method of it. In Numbers 9-16, the Lord told Moses “to eat the lamb, together with unleavened bread and bitter herbs”. This standard “protein + carbohydrate + vitamin” nutrition combination is highly recommended in the healthy diet now. Yet this healthy diet recipe appeared in the *Holy Bible* so early that we have to admire the wisdom of ancestors. Simultaneously, the skilled use of flour by ancestors has also affected today's eating habits. During the process of making cakes and bread, the amount of flour is fairly accurate, which has the characteristics of western style in baking. The Sovereign Lord once told his people to provide grain offering “consisting of a sixth of an ephah with a third of a hin of oil to moisten the flour” every morning. In addition, the unleavened bread, the bread of affliction, is highly recommended by God than the bread with yeast (Deuteronomy 16-3). From the perspective of cooking, the unleavened bread belongs to the pastry products made of cold water dough, and the storage time is relatively long. However, the bread with yeast will be enlarged due to yeast. Under the conditions at that time, the purity of flour fertilizer is not very good. There are not only yeast but also other miscellaneous bacteria to play the role of fermentation. The bread with yeast may produce sour or other miscellaneous flavor after a long time of storage, which will affect health. Nowadays, western people still like to eat flour and macaroni made of hard wheat with high quality protein, which is one of the reasons that can not be ignored to promote the health of residents in this area.

2.2 Food and mental health

In spite of the physical impact upon healthy diet today, the biblical food rules are also helpful for mental health, especially those people with eating disturbances. Eating disturbances varies from binge eating, chronic diet, anorexia, excessive exercising, weight cycling and so on. According to data, the prevalence of eating disorders in American women has increased by an average of 36%

every five years since 1950s (Van Hoeken et al. 13). Since different kind of religious involvement have positive influence on people's mental health, faith-based diet has been used to help those people in need (Harmon 217). Religious involvements like eating biblical food, showing respect for food and God, receiving and spreading love among helpless people through organizational groups not only provide the basis of regular diet for patients, but also make mental preparation for further healthy diet (Henderson 958).

3 Conclusion

Human life is an extremely complex system which cannot be separated from food. From the emergence of human life to the life span change caused by the change of food from vegetation to meat after the flood, all the taboos and requirements for food reflect the will and commandments of God. Without the sacred coat, the biblical food rules contain a lot of inspiration and requirements for healthy diet essentially. Although history is changing and life is evolving, as the essence of life, people who eat every day need to settle down in body and mind and pursue the value and significance of life. Nowadays, food safety crisis and environmental problems are increasingly prominent all over the world, which cause great damage not only to human life, but also to other species and ecological environment. In the *Bible*, the way of respecting life, caring for the universe, and improving the spiritual level provides a reference for modern people to construct their spiritual homes in today's materialistic world.

The biblical idea of diet is worthy of further exploration. There is no doubt that healthy diet plays an important role in both physical and mental health. It is advisable to pay attention to the quality and quantity of food. The *Holy Bible* teaches us not only the biblical food rules, but also the spirit of self-control and the temptation of useless food. If we ignore these truths, we will bring harm to ourselves and often bring pain to others. Therefore, actively exploring the dietary rules in the *Bible* is beneficial to the health of human's spiritual life and dietary life.

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