

## Q 2.5 What does the Bible say about hunting?

God created humans to be gardeners, not hunters. The two hunters mentioned by name in the Bible (Nimrod and Esau) are described as enemies of God. God placed restrictions on hunting that carry steep penalties if not strictly adhered to. The only way to fully adhere to such restrictions is to abstain from hunting entirely. Needlessly killing a defenseless animal also goes against God's character of mercy and compassion.

### **Hunting is Contrary to God's Very Good Design**

God's plan for humanity wasn't for us to be hunters but instead to be gardeners: *"The LORD God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to work it and take care of it"* (Genesis 2:15, NIV). He told us to eat a diet consisting entirely of fruit and vegetation, *"And God said, 'See, I have given you every herb that yields seed which is on the face of all the earth, and every tree whose fruit yields seed; to you it shall be for food'"* (Genesis 1:29, NKJV). God called this arrangement 'very good', *"And God looked upon all that He had made, and indeed, it was very good. And there was evening, and there was morning—the sixth day"* (Genesis 1:31, BSB). Hunting animals to eat their flesh goes against this instruction and is

inexcusable<sup>1</sup> and cruel<sup>2</sup>. When God's very good world is restored to the way God intended it to be from the beginning, the Bible says even the animals will no longer hunt each other: *"The wolf will live with the lamb, the leopard will lie down with the goat, the calf and the lion and the yearling together; and a little child will lead them"* (Isaiah 11:6, NIV).<sup>3</sup> So there is no place for hunting anywhere in God's very good design for creation.

## Hunters Mentioned in the Bible

The first hunter mentioned in Scripture is Nimrod, the founder of Babylon: *"Cush begot Nimrod; he began to be a giant on the earth. He was a giant, a hunter before the Lord God; therefore they would say, 'As Nimrod the giant, the hunter*

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<sup>1</sup> "As far as the 'We must kill them because there are too many and they'll starve' argument goes, often the populations of deer and other 'edible' species are purposely 'exploded' in order to cater to hunters, sell more hunting licenses, and provide more recreation for residents and special interest visitors. Game 'management' programs are actually game propagation programs, designed not to reduce or restrict the animals' numbers but to fool desirable species into overpopulating. The most obvious is to shoot only males and to protect females so they can keep on bearing fawns. Another favorite trick is to plant far more tasty vegetation or browse than a region would normally support. Left to their own devices, deer 'read' the available food supply and reproduce based on how much there is to sustain their herds. If it is a good year, a doe may have one fawn or twins. If faced with nutritional stress, a doe may simply not ovulate, and bucks will reduce their sperm count. If disaster strikes, a doe can reabsorb her fetus. When state wildlife departments (composed almost solely of hunters) fool the deer, the birth rate goes up" (Newkirk, Ingrid. *You Can Save the Animals: 251 Ways to Stop Thoughtless Cruelty*. Rocklin, CA: Prima Publishing, 1999, page 94).

<sup>2</sup> Hunting "is inextricably linked to the decimation of species, the genocide of the Native Americans, and the growth of one of the greediest, vainest types of animal abuse in this country today - the pastime of trophy hunters, who hunt rare and endangered animals in order to hang bodies on their walls and get listed in a book" (Williams, Erin E. and Margo DeMello. *Why Animals Matter: The Case for Animal Protection*. Amherst, New York: Prometheus Books, 2007, page 148).

<sup>3</sup> A little child leading the animals suggests they are leading in the way of peace—and this starts with leading by example, in the image and likeness of our loving Creator. Jesus said: *"Truly I tell you, unless you change and become like little children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven"* (Matthew 18:13, NIV).

*before the Lord.’ And the beginning of his kingdom was Babylon”* (Genesis 10:8-10, OSB). Throughout the Bible, Babylon represents those who oppose God<sup>4</sup>. The other hunter mentioned in Scripture is Esau, whose ways are contrasted with his brother Jacob’s peaceful ways: *“When the boys grew up, Esau became a skillful hunter, a man of the field, but Jacob was a peaceful man, living in tents”* (Genesis 25:27, NASB). The Bible explicitly states that God hated Esau: *“I have loved Jacob, but Esau I have hated, and I have turned his hill country into a wasteland and left his inheritance to the desert jackals”* (Malachi 1:2-3, NIV). As author Matthew Priebe puts it, *“The only two people mentioned in the Bible as ‘hunters’ are Nimrod and Esau, enemies of God’s people who are remembered for destroying life.”*<sup>5</sup> Alfonso, Sperling, and Rabinowitz in the Encyclopedia Judaica echo this same idea: *“The two famous hunters in the Bible, Nimrod and Esau, were regarded in a derogatory light, as ‘rebels against God.”*<sup>6</sup> Given that the only hunters mentioned by name in the Bible are described as enemies of and rebels against God, it would seem unwise to emulate their behavior by engaging in the practice of hunting.

### **Isaac’s Preference for Esau**

In Genesis 27 Isaac instructs his son Esau to go out and hunt for him: *“Isaac said, ‘I am now an old man and don’t know the day of my death. Now then, get your equipment--your quiver and bow--and go out to the open country to hunt some wild game for me. Prepare me the kind of tasty food I like and bring it to me to eat, so that I may give you my blessing before I die.”*” (Genesis 27:2-4, NIV).

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<sup>4</sup> “And on her forehead a mysterious name was written: BABYLON THE GREAT, THE MOTHER OF PROSTITUTES AND OF THE ABOMINATIONS OF THE EARTH. I could see that the woman was drunk with the blood of the saints and witnesses for Jesus. And I was utterly amazed at the sight of her” (Revelation 17:5-6, BSB).

<sup>5</sup> Priebe, Matthew. *Animals, Ethics, and Christianity: Are Animals Important to Our Salvation?* Galt, CA: Ask the Animals Productions, 2018, page 41.

<sup>6</sup> Alfonso, Laurentino; Sperling, S.; Rabinowitz, Louis. "Hunting." Encyclopaedia Judaica. *Encyclopedia.com*. 13 Jan. 2021

Since Isaac was a man of faith<sup>7</sup> who was blessed by God<sup>8</sup>, and Jesus confirmed Isaac's presence in the kingdom of God<sup>9</sup>, some may conclude from this evidence that God approves of hunting. This line of reasoning, however, fails to acknowledge that most characters in the Bible, including many who were blessed and used by God for good, are complex characters who often have flaws and make mistakes. For instance: Moses and Aaron failed to give glory to God when striking the rock for water when the Israelites were thirsty<sup>10</sup>; David committed adultery with Bathsheba, had her husband killed<sup>11</sup>, and was a man of war who shed blood<sup>12</sup>; Peter was sharply rebuked by Jesus<sup>13</sup> and denied him three times<sup>14</sup>; all of the disciples lacked faith in Jesus at one point or another<sup>15</sup>, even when hearing report of His resurrection<sup>16</sup>; and Isaac's father Abraham laughed at

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<sup>7</sup> "By faith Isaac blessed Jacob and Esau in regard to their future" (Hebrews 11:20, NIV).

<sup>8</sup> "Isaac planted crops in that land and the same year reaped a hundredfold, because the LORD blessed him" (Genesis 26:12, NIV).

<sup>9</sup> "There will be weeping and gnashing of teeth when you see Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and all the prophets in the kingdom of God, but you yourselves are thrown out" (Luke 13:28, BSB).

<sup>10</sup> "But the LORD said to Moses and Aaron, 'Because you did not trust in me enough to honor me as holy in the sight of the Israelites, you will not bring this community into the land I give them.'" (Numbers 20:12, NIV).

<sup>11</sup> "When Uriah's wife heard that her husband was dead, she mourned for him. And when the time of mourning was over, David had her brought to his house, and she became his wife and bore him a son. But the thing that David had done was evil in the sight of the LORD" (2 Samuel 11:26-27, BSB).

<sup>12</sup> "But God said to me, 'You shall not build a house for My name, because you have been a man of war and have shed blood.'" (1 Chronicles 28:3, NKJV).

<sup>13</sup> "But He turned and said to Peter, 'Get behind Me, Satan! You are an offense to Me, for you are not mindful of the things of God, but the things of men.'" (Matthew 16:23, NKJV).

<sup>14</sup> "Then he began to curse and swear, saying, 'I do not know the Man!' Immediately a rooster crowed. And Peter remembered the word of Jesus who had said to him, 'Before the rooster crows, you will deny Me three times.' So he went out and wept bitterly" (Matthew 26:74-75, NKJV).

<sup>15</sup> "'Where is your faith?' he asked his disciples. In fear and amazement they asked one another, 'Who is this? He commands even the winds and the water, and they obey him.'" (Luke 8:25, NIV).

<sup>16</sup> "But they did not believe the women, because their words seemed to them like nonsense" (Luke 24:11, NIV).

the idea that God would give him Isaac as a son<sup>17</sup>. So, Isaac making this request to his son Esau to go hunt for him may prove that Isaac approved of hunting, but it definitely does not prove that God approves of hunting. It's possible Isaac was making a mistake, just as many other blessed men of faith in Scripture are described as making mistakes.<sup>18</sup> Instead, based on the language used to describe the request—*'the kind of tasty food I like'*, it appears Isaac in this instance may have been giving in to the desires of his flesh, something God warns us to abstain from doing<sup>19</sup>. This is likely the most plausible explanation, given that Isaac favored Esau over Jacob because of his *'taste for wild game'*<sup>20</sup>, yet God favored Jacob over Esau<sup>21</sup>.

### **Cut Off from the Community of God**

In Leviticus there are multiple restrictions placed on those who insist on hunting: the animal cannot be among those described as unclean, and you cannot consume any amount of blood or fat<sup>22</sup> from the hunted animal. The passage states: *"Any Israelite or any foreigner residing among you who hunts any animal or bird that may be eaten must drain out the blood and cover it with earth because the life of every creature is its blood. That is why I have said to the Israelites, 'You must not eat the blood of any creature, because the life of every creature is its blood; anyone who eats it must be cut off.'"* (Leviticus 17:13-14, NIV, referencing Genesis 9:4 and Leviticus 7:26-27). Failing to adhere to either of

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<sup>17</sup> "Then Abraham fell on his face and laughed and said to himself, 'Shall a child be born to a man who is a hundred years old? Shall Sarah, who is ninety years old, bear a child?'" (Genesis 17:17, ESV).

<sup>18</sup> Clementine Homilies 2.52 suggests that these things written against the righteous prophets are false and were added by the lying scribes spoken of in Jeremiah 8:8.

<sup>19</sup> "Beloved, I urge you, as foreigners and exiles, to abstain from the desires of the flesh, which war against your soul" (1 Peter 2:11, BSB).

<sup>20</sup> "Because Isaac had a taste for wild game, he loved Esau" (Genesis 25:28, BSB).

<sup>21</sup> "Just as it is written: 'Jacob I loved, but Esau I hated.'" (Romans 9:13, NIV, referencing Malachi 1:2-3).

<sup>22</sup> "It is a permanent statute throughout your generations in all your dwelling places: you shall not eat any fat or any blood" (Leviticus 3:17, NASB).

these restrictions results in the severe consequence of being cut off completely from among God's people.

### **The Impossibility of Satisfying the Restriction**

Although the Israelites in the narrative evidently did not fully grasp the impossibility of completely draining every drop of blood from an animal carcass, it is worth mentioning that meeting this restriction cannot physically be accomplished in its entirety. You can only mostly fulfill it by draining most of the blood out of the animal's slain body. As Rudd puts it, *"Kosher killing, with ceremonial throat cutting and blood-letting is the merest sophistry to circumvent these instructions, for not all the blood of an animal can be drained from its arteries."*<sup>23</sup> The only way to completely adhere to this command to abstain from blood is to consume no flesh at all, which is exactly what God instructed us to do from the beginning when He designed us to be herbivorous gardeners: *"And God said, 'See, I have given you every herb that yields seed which is on the face of all the earth, and every tree whose fruit yields seed; to you it shall be for food.'"* (Genesis 1:29, NKJV).

### **Reflecting God's Character**

God's character is that of love and compassion: *"The LORD is gracious and compassionate, slow to anger and rich in love"* (Psalm 145:8, NIV). Hunting and killing a defenseless animal goes against this character. Jesus tells us to *"Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful"* (Luke 6:36, NIV). It is especially merciless to trophy hunt or to hunt for sport. To embody God's character, we should take joy in showing compassion to animals rather than gaining pleasure from the bloodthirst of hunting. As theologian Andrew Linzey puts it, *"...the sheer wantonness represented by the unnecessary activity of hunting constitutes*

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<sup>23</sup> Rudd, Geoffrey L. *Why Kill for Food?* Wilmslow, Cheshire: The Vegetarian Society, 1956, page 80.

*nothing less than an offence to God.*<sup>24</sup> And when it comes to hunting for sustenance, we should make every effort possible to subsist off of vegetation rather than animal flesh, in order to embody God's character of mercy toward all<sup>25</sup> and to live according to the way God designed us<sup>26</sup>. If we live in a place where it is not possible to survive on the diet God designed us for, then we should make it a priority to transform the land such that it becomes possible. Otherwise, we should prioritize relocating to a place where it is possible.

### **Putting it All Together**

The only way to fully adhere to God's restrictions on hunting, including the strict prohibition against consuming any amount of blood, is to adhere to the original instruction of eating only fruit and vegetation; the two hunters mentioned by name in Scripture (Nimrod and Esau) are spoken of as enemies of God; and hunting goes against God's character of compassion. These pieces of evidence suggest it would be unwise to make the mistake Isaac made of favoring what God hates<sup>27</sup>, simply for the sake of taste. It would be wiser to abstain from hunting altogether and instead to live according to God's original very good plan of eating fruit and vegetation as gardeners while living peaceably toward animals:

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<sup>24</sup> Andrew Linzey, *Animal Theology*, 118.

<sup>25</sup> "The LORD is good to all; His compassion rests on all He has made" (Psalm 145:9, BSB).

<sup>26</sup> "Then God said, 'I give you every seed-bearing plant on the face of the whole earth and every tree that has fruit with seed in it. They will be yours for food.'" (Genesis 1:29, NIV).

<sup>27</sup> I am not necessarily suggesting that the sole reason God hated Esau was because he was a hunter, but he was one of only two hunters mentioned by name in Scripture and is also one of the only characters in which it is explicitly stated that God hated him. This makes it difficult not to see a significance in the correlation between someone's hunting and God's hatred toward them, especially given the stark contrast between hunting and God's very good plan for creation. And even if we assume I'm wrong about this point, the fact still remains that Isaac's evaluation of Esau over Jacob is stated as being the reverse of God's evaluation. This means something evidently was backwards in Isaac's evaluation, and the cited reason for Isaac's preference for Esau over Jacob was Isaac's '*taste for wild game*', indicating that his taste buds likely hindered his ability to hate what God hates, namely the kind of life Esau was living.

*“If possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all”* (Romans 12:18, ESV)<sup>28</sup>.

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<sup>28</sup> Some translations render this passage ‘all men’ or ‘all people’, but there is no such qualifier in the original Greek. The word used is πάντων (pantōn) meaning ‘all, any, every, the whole, every kind’. Absent any modifier, there is no reason to assume the passage is restricted only to humans and excludes animals.