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A CHOSEN DIET OF JOHN THE BAPTIST: MATTHEW 3:4 IN THE LIGHT OF HEALTH REFORM TEACHING ON NATURAL DIET

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Abstract

John the Baptist's choice of living on a natural diet, locusts and honey, is central to the Matthean narrative. Studies have shown that the choice of diet has remained the last resort for the reduction of the global burden of non-communicable disease and is included in Goal three of the 2015 United Nations Sustainable Development Goals on healthy living and well-being for all ages. Previous studies on the choice of diet have focused more on the individual and global human health benefits and consequences than its contributions to physically healthy living and spiritual upliftment of humans from the scriptural context. Therefore, this paper examines John the Baptist's chosen diet in Matthew 3:4 within Health Reform Teaching on a natural diet. This was with a view to establishing the right dietary choice for humans, especially the Seventh Day Adventists. Peter Stuhlmacher's theory of biblical interpretation was adopted and the interpretive design was used. The paper reveals that John the Baptist's chosen natural diet in Matthew 3:4 contributed to his physical healthy living and spiritual upliftment. While a natural diet has little or no cholesterol, a fleshy diet has saturated fat and creates the risk of the direct transfer of diseases (cardiovascular diseases) and toxins (mercury) from meat and fish to humans when not properly cooked, which later results in cancer, tumour, diabetes and cardiovascular diseases (hypertension, high blood pressure, obesity, etc.). The paper recommends that living on a natural diet is of great importance to humans as enshrined in Matthew 3:4.

Keywords: Dietary choice, John the Baptist, Health Reform, Natural diet, Matthean Narrative.

Natural Diet: A Definition

According to Soanes and Stevenson (2004), a Natural Diet is defined as food existing in or derived from nature; not made, caused by, or processed by humans. For Webster (2022), it is food that has undergone minimal processing and contains no preservatives or artificial additives. Dwyer (2008) avers that the practice of living on a natural diet can be classified under the lifestyle called vegetarianism which is in various forms. The first form is the

category of people who live on natural food (pure vegetarians), who avoid some or all animal foods, like, meat, poultry, fish, eggs, and milk; the second is, the semi-vegetarians, which avoid meat but eat poultry and other animal food; the third is the Lacto-ovo-vegetarians, which avoid meat and fish, but include milk and eggs as the only animal foods in their diets; and the fourth are those vegetarians who practise veganism, eating no animal foods at all, which many among them, avoid wearing animal products, such as leather and wool, who likely than other vegetarians shun alcoholic beverages, processed foods, and foods grown with chemical fertilizers or pesticides.

Baham (2020) claims that the book of Matthew, one of the synoptic gospels (Matthew, Luke and mark), is distinct in the announcement of the King of the universe, Jesus Christ – the Messiah. As it is traditionally and culturally understood that messengers go before kings, the book of Matthew presents John the Baptist as God's chosen servant, a forerunner and announcer of the Messiah – the King. John the Baptist was saddled with this exclusive responsibility, which comes with great, strict and difficult tasks. No wonder, John the Baptist did not only live in the wilderness but on a natural diet. On this Matthew says, "αὐτὸς δὲ ὁ Ἰωάννης εἶχεν τὸ ἔνδυμα αὐτοῦ ἀπὸ τριχῶν καμήλου καὶ ζώνην δερματίνην περὶ τὴν ὀσφὺν αὐτοῦ, ἡ δὲ τροφὴ ἦν αὐτοῦ ἀκρίδες καὶ μέλι ἄγριον." "Now John wore a garment of camel's hair, and a leather girdle around his waist; and his food was locusts and wild honey," (Matthew 3:4).This introduction of locusts and wild honey in John's diet in the above text calls for scholarly debate, and its interpretation from the perspective of natural diet has received little attention.

Different interpretations have been given to the locusts and wild honey diet of John the Baptist by different scholars. Among the scholars who have interpreted this passage are Baham (2020) and Douglas (1987:694), from the perspective of asceticism, aver that the geographical location of John the Baptist's ministry enables him to live on locusts and honey. While Kolawole (2019), from a leadership perspective, claims that John's diet is a metaphor and it symbolises humility in leadership, Caird (1963:59), from traditional prophetic fulfilment, argues that John's wilderness lifestyle was a re-enactment of God's deliverance of Israel from the wilderness. Alfred (1859), Erasmus (1986), Wettstein (1962) and Bochart (1793), from traditional history, perceive that the Mosaic Law permitted the eating of locusts. Kelnhofer (2003:104-127),from the angle of availability in antiquity, opines that the wild honey and locusts diet of John the Baptist was the food made available for John the Baptist to eat and it was not necessarily on health grounds. But Nichol (1957:296-307) and White (1967:216), from the moral perspective, affirm that John's diet, in addition to its being health based, is fundamental to spiritual nourishment. None of these scholars has viewed this text from the natural dietary perspective and its relevance to the Adventists in Ilishan-Remo Districts. Given this background, the paper unravels from Matthew 3:4 the nexus between the locusts and wild honey (natural diet) and health reform.

Why was the choice of a natural diet for John the Baptist? No doubt in our world today with all the health-related challenges, dietary choice plays a vital role in human survival (Dickson 2009:4). Hence, for Dwyer (2008), the practice of eating a natural diet (vegetables, fruits, nuts, grains and legumes with no animal product), based on health and religious belief, has been a long-debated issue in the world.

It could be recalled that God gave human beings fruits and herbs (natural diet) as food from creation (Genesis 1:29); and God out of the ground, gave every tree that is pleasant to the sight, and the tree of life in the future, as food to humanity (Genesis 2:9; Revelation 22:2). The selected biblical text, Matthew 3:4 does not only corroborate the abovementioned submission of the books of Genesis and Revelation but reaffirms that a natural diet is completely for sound health for all humanity. In addition, records (United Nations Environment Programme 2021) have shown that a natural diet is healthy than fleshy food and the United Nations in support has emphasized the importance of fruits and vegetables. In what ways can John the Baptist's s choice of natural diet in Matthew 3:4 serve as a catalyst for living by a natural diet? Has the choice of natural diet in Matthew 3:4probably constituted the Seventh-Day Adventist Church's biblical injunction and concept of natural diet in her health reform? Although it is a matter of scholarly debate, the Seventh-Day Adventist Church in her health reform doctrine advises members to live by (White 1946:472).Besides, science has nowadays promoted the use of vegetables and fruits (natural diet) over meat and fleshy food as revealed in the food pyramid shown below.



Natural Diet and John the Baptist in the Gospels

All through the gospels, the knowledge of John the Baptist's choice of natural diet was mentioned only in Matthew 3:4 and Mark 1:6. Again, the texts that showcase ἀκρίδες καὶ μέλι ἄγριον, "locusts and wild honey" (natural diet) of John the Baptist in the Gospels are Matthew 3:4 and Mark 1:6. For instance, the Greek verb ἐσθίων, "to eat", the participle used in Mark 1:6, expresses action, while the Greek word τροφὴ, "food", a noun nominative deployed in Matthew 3:4, forms the working text for this study. Since the author of Matthew never identified himself repeatedly in the book, yet, the story of his conversion and the level of the organization of the book speak volumes about the disciple by name "Matthew" who was once a tax collector (Matthew9:9-10) (Romulo 2014). Again, early Christian Tradition almost unanimously recognized Matthew as the author of the book that bears his name: Papias, the Bishop of Hierapolis (C.AD 125); Irenaeus at Lyons (C.AD. 130-c. 202); Origen (C.AD. 186 –

254); and Eusebius accepted Matthew the Apostle as the author of the book of Matthew (Romulo 2014).

From the beginning, it has always been the thought of God for good, to give a man an expected end (Jeremiah 29:11), in all ramifications with health inclusive. And in His divine love, He has made provisions for the wellbeing of the humans (the promise of health through a natural diet) He had created (Revelation 22:2). Also, the dietary choice of eating ἀκρίδες καὶ μέλι ἄγριον (locusts and wild honey) by John the Baptist in Matthew 3:4, takes us back to Exodus3:8, where God first made mention of milk and honey as part of the good things of what Israel will enjoy in the land of Canaan, which He mentioned in 23 other times, (Exodus 3:17; 13: 5; 33:3; Leviticus 20:24; Numbers 13:27; 14:8; 16:13, etc.). Probably, the idea of milk and honey and its provision in the Promised Land, came as a follow-up to the original provision of a natural diet in Eden, where God gave the man a natural diet as food (Genesis 1:29). In this sense, God's original intention may suggest a call back to the original diet and the importance of health and the choice of diet (Dickson 2009:1).

Although Buttrick (1989:486) argues that there is a contradiction between humans' dominion over fish and meat (fleshy food) (Genesis 1:26)and fruit and vegetables (a natural diet) (Genesis 1:29), Dickson posits that a natural diet, as part of creation, is the specific diet for humanity as prescribed by God (Genesis 1:29) (Dickson 2009:3).Also, White (1946:381), Davidson (2003:114-130) and Manu (2005:4)affirm that a natural diet has been God's original diet for humanity from creation. This is true of Adam and Eve who were living on the original natural diet in the Garden of Eden before they sinned and God drove them out of the Garden. Even after the fall, they still lived the whole of their lives on fruits and vegetables (Genesis 1:29, 30; 2:16). Likewise, Isin (2021) attests to the Genesis narratives that Adam and Eve ate a natural diet even after the fall. Subsequently, the children of Israel's favourite diets were more of natural food in Egypt, in the wilderness (manna) (Numbers 11:5, 6, 32, 33), and in their Promised Land, Canaan (milk and honey) (Exodus 3:17; 13: 5; 33:3; Leviticus 20:24; Numbers 13:27; 14:8; 16:13, etc.). Also, the Nazarite Samson lived on a natural diet (honey) (Judges 14:9). Worthy of note is that Samson had some things in common with John the Baptist. First, as the angel of the Lord appeared to his parent and there were strict warnings (Judges 13:7, 12-13) so the same angel appeared to John's parents and gave strict warnings (Luke 1:13-15). Second, both Samson and John the Baptist lived on honey (a natural diet) (Judges 14:9; Matthew 3:4). Third, they were all Nazarites and filled by the Spirit of God (Judges 14:6; Luke 1:15). Fourth, they had specific tasks and missions (Judges 13: 5; Matthew 3:3). The aforementioned may have informed John the Baptist and the forerunner of Jesus Christ to eat and live on a natural diet (locusts and wild honey) in Matthew 3:4.

Exegesis of Matthew 3:4

αὐτὸς δὲ ὁ Ἰωάννης εἶχεν τὸ ἔνδυμα αὐτοῦ ἀπὸ τριχῶν καμήλου καὶ ζώνην δερματίνην περὶ τὴν ὀσφὺν αὐτοῦ, ἡ δὲ τροφὴ ἦν αὐτοῦ ἀκρίδες καὶ μέλι ἄγριον., "Now John wore a garment of camel's hair, and a leather girdle around his waist; and his food was locusts and wild honey" (Matthew 3:4).

From the ongoing, it is imperative to understand the termsἡ δὲ τροφὴ ἦν αὐτοῦ ἀκρίδες καὶ μέλι ἄγριον in the Matthean context. From the analysis, the wordτροφὴ could be rendered in two different ways as either food (natural), or nourishment (spiritual). But based on the

context in Matthew 3:4, for Baham (2020), it is obvious that the meaning oftροφὴused is that of physical natural foods. It is the same word used in Daniel 4:12 and 21 to describe food from nature, which Henry believes reminds humans of the gracious provision of God. On the other hand, the word ἀκρίδες, from the original word ἀκρίς which is translated as locus, could also be rendered as grasshopper as used in Numbers 13:33; Psalms 108:23; Isaiah 40:22; and in Revelation 9:3. Likewise, the wordμέλι ἄγριον, literal means wild honey. While Kelnhofer (2004) says that John the Baptist ate the honey sap from the tree, White (1946:71) and Nichol (1957:296) attests to the honey that came from natural bees and that the wild honey John ate probably was not the sap of certain trees, as some have thought, but honey gathered by swarms of wild bees and deposited in the hollows of trees or perhaps in rocks.

Health Benefits of Locusts and Wild Honey

Locusts: Dubois (2020) states that the origin of locusts is unclear, but ancient texts (including the Bible) narrate their destructive abilities (Exodus 8:24). Locusts are one of many species of insects considered edible as food (Leviticus 11:22), and they are prepared in numerous ways, ranging from dry, smoked to fried. The nutrients gotten from locusts are protein and fat: ***(a) Protein:*** Species of locusts vary in protein content from about 50 per cent of dry weight to almost 60 per cent, making them denser in protein than cows. ***(b) Fat:*** A study shows that the percentage of fat in desert locusts is lower than their percentage of protein, about 12 per cent, according to the 'Journal of King Saud University, 2001 edition. However, the cholesterol content in locusts is high, about 286 milligrams per 100 grams, which is higher than that found in meat or poultry. Other nutrients found in locusts include adequate amounts of iodine, phosphorus, iron, thiamine, riboflavin, and niacin, as well as traces of calcium, magnesium and selenium. Also, the carbohydrate levels in locusts are very low, which qualifies them as good Atkins and Paleo types of diets.

Honey: In the books of Exodus, Judges, Matthew and Proverbs honey is considered a rare natural diet (food) with exceptional nutritional attendants. According to Abdulwahid, Chamunorwa, and Erlwanger (2012), the composition of honey is mainly sugars and water. Interestingly, the sugar in honey is sweeter and gives more energy than artificial sweeteners; and the most abundant sugar in honey is fructose. In addition, it contains several vitamins and minerals, including B vitamins. Other constituents of honey are amino acids, antibiotic-rich inhibin, proteins, phenol antioxidants, and micronutrients.

The Contributions of locusts and wild honey to John's healthy and Spiritual life

Since the fall of man, death became inevitable, humans face health challenges and the life span got reduced. Thus there is a need for the consciousness of humans to live by the principles of health (dietary laws). While locusts enrich healthy living, honey enlightens and brightens the sight (Leviticus 11:22; 1 Samuel 14:27-29).On the one hand, John the Baptist's locusts and wild honey diet might have contributed physically, to his sight, vigour, sound mind and longevity. Remarkably, there was no record to prove that John the Baptist fell sick for close to 30 years he lived, before being beheaded by Herod Antipas (Ayegboyin 2015:12). On the other hand, John the Baptist's locusts and wild honey diet might have contributed to his spiritual upliftment: the angel's instruction to his parents (Luke 1:15) and the delivery in the spirit and power of Elias of his fearless messages (Luke 1:17) (Nichol 1957:296). No wonder, Nichol states, "an abstemious diet is essential to mental strength and spiritual insight, and a right understanding and practice of the sacred truths of God's word. These qualities were essential

for John, who came 'in the spirit and power of Elias' (Luke 1:17), and they are essential for those who are to bear Elijah's message to the world today. "Hence, a call for obedience to the principles of health in the Scripture is central to healthy living and spiritual growth as the Johannine epistle also advocates, "Beloved, I pray that all may go well with you and that you may be in health; I know that it is well with your soul" (3 John 1:2). Christians healthy living is tantamount to an obedient living (Revelation 21:8; Galatians 5:21). Unfortunately, the life of gluttony at the expense of health has become a re-occurring experience of many in the contemporary world (1946:147). Many have died as a result of what they have taken as food (Coles, Hepburn and Bennett 18885:188). Also, sicknesses like diabetes, cancer, tumour, obesity, cardiovascular diseases, etc. are traceable to food (White 1948:159). Research has shown that such sicknesses as mentioned above are highly gotten from fleshy diets (fish and meats). The reasons have been that most of the fleshy foods eaten now are diseased (White 1948:59), the clean animals inclusive. The question is should one on the basis that some animals eaten now are diseased, avoid meat? For Coles, Hepburn and Bennett, humans were created to eat a mixed diet both a natural diet and an animal diet (meat)(Coles, Hepburn and Bennett 18885:188). But Dickson (2009:15) argues that there are clear medically certified risks involved in flesh intake. The dietary restriction (Leviticus 11 and Deuteronomy 14) with a distinction between *kosher*, 'clean' and *teraifa* (Dietary Laws Oracle Education Foundation 2022), 'unclean' was intentional (Dickson 2009:15) which includes health purity, national consciousness, holiness, ritual and ceremony among others (Hamilton 1993:273-276).However, Harris and Jordan claim that the death of Jesus Christ on the cross abrogated the Mosaic Law, thereby putting away the restriction between the clean and the unclean and upholding the abrogation of the dietary law (Harris 1987; Jordan 1992). But Moskala (2000:216) and Hamilton (1993:273-276)say that the dietary law of Leviticus 11 and Deuteronomy 14 are applicable today. Quoting Genesis 1:31, Moskala (2000) avers that after God gave humans a natural diet as food in Genesis 1:29, His pronouncement that 'all' He created was good, makes 'all' things clean; and he takes exception to eat snakes, spiders, centipedes, rats, lizards, cockroaches, vultures, frogs, etc. If Moskala (2000:139-143) was right, what about those cultures where worms, frogs, etc., are permitted? For Dickson (2009:53), this question begs for an answer. On the one hand, a school of thought claims that clean food (fish and meat) in the dietary law of Moses is recommended as food for Christians. On the other hand, another school of thought posits that a non-fleshy food (a natural diet) in the dietary law of John the Baptist is recommended for Christians to live on – this is the perception of the Seventh-Day Adventist Church. Davidson (2003:127) says that although the Seventh-Day Adventist Church preaches health reform, the church only recommends a natural diet for its members, of whom nearly one and a half do not eat meat. He added that those who eat meat chose carefully to observe the clean and unclean distinction. No doubt, the Seventh-Day Adventists, as a result of their dietary practices, have frequently been the object of scientific studies, involving the relationship of diet to health in the United States. Interestingly, results have consistently found that Adventists live longer and enjoy better health than the rest of the population in the United States. Could it be that they live longer than others because they do not eat fleshy foods that they chose their meats carefully or are aware of the health-related problems associated with meat eating? According to Schwarz and Greenleaf, the practice of eating a natural diet (vegetarianism) (Majumder 1972:175-179) in the Seventh-Day Adventist Church rests on a healthy basis (Schwarz 2000:102) which can be traced back in history to Ellen Gould White, the greatest American woman author with over 3000 published books on different disciplines, and over 5000 manuscripts, letters, articles and sermons (White 1915:425-439), whose

extensive writings are still held in high regard by the Church (2008:xxiii–xxiv), was a prophetess (Butler 1991:3-29), a spiritual leader, a preacher (Nickolai 2003:145-159), a health reformer and the most valued influential woman in the Seventh-Day Adventist Church, having the most translated works all over the world (Vandervliet 1978:146-147), one among the founders of the Church, who was shown the harmful effect of tobacco, tea and coffee in 1848(Schwarz and Greenleaf 2000:102). Before that time, liquor, tobacco, coffee, tea and pork meat were the order of the day among members of the Seventh-Day Adventist Church, except for Captain Joseph Bates whose health was not impaired as a result of his vegetarian life, which assumedly, maybe a proof of what Majumder submits that "You are what you eat" (Majumder 1972:175).The natural diet became part of Adventist Health Reform worldwide after June 5th1863, when Ellen Gould White was shown a greater vision of the health risk of members, beyond the vision against liquor, this time on a diet (flesh)(Schwarz and Greenleaf 2000:105). She says, "If meat-eating was ever healthful, it is not safe now; cancers, tumours, and pulmonary diseases are largely caused by meat-eating" (White 1958:231). White being sensitive to the grave problem of diseased animals wrote,

> The flesh was never the best food, but its use is now doubly objectionable since disease in animals is so rapidly increasing . . . Could you know the nature of the meat you eat, could you see the animals when living from which the flesh is taken when dead, you would turn with loathing from your flesh meats. The very animals whose flesh you eat, are frequently so diseased that, if left alone, they would die of themselves; but while the breath of life is in them, they are killed and brought to market. You take directly into your systems . . . poison of the worst kind, and yet you realize it not . . . In many places, fish become so contaminated by the filth on which they feed as to be a cause of disease. This is especially the case where the fish come in contact with the sewage of large cities . . . Thus when used as food they bring disease and death to those who do not suspect the danger (White 1946:380, 395-396).

Based on the above statement by White, the question one may ask is, are there scientific or medical records in support of this? Fox, describing meat-eating as unhealthy from a medical point of view, submits that

> The statistical record of high meat consumption and increased probability of colon, breast, and other cancers, heart disease, and atherosclerosis, the major leading causes of death in North America has been well established by independent researchers (Barnard1990; Fiddles 1991; Mitra 1991; National Research Council 1989; Robbins 1987). As a result of this realization, Health and Welfare Canada (a federal government department) issued a new version of Canada's Food Guide to Healthy Eating in 1992. As alternatives to meats, tofu and legumes are accentuated, were 5-10 servings per day of vegetables and fruits and 5-12 servings per day of grain products (Fox 2000:163-174).

Also, White maintains that if not for the intervention of the livestock industry which lobbied against the endorsement of the Guide, a natural diet would have been endorsed(Fox 2000:163-174).This among other medical reports shows that flesh-eating poses danger to health.

The health reform teaching of the Seventh-Day Adventist Church was based on dietary law primarily found in Leviticus 11 and Deuteronomy 14 and elsewhere in the Bible. And since locusts were permitted for eating in Leviticus 11:22 and honey, though not mentioned specifically in Leviticus and Deuteronomy but were promised to the children of Israel in the Canaan Land and by implication was permitted for eating and was eaten by many biblical characters including John the Baptist (Exodus 3:17; 13: 5; 33:3; Leviticus 20:24; Numbers 13:27; 14:8; 16:13; 1 Samuel 14: 27-29, etc.), made it crystal clear that locusts and honey are permitted in the Seventh-Day Adventist Health Reform as food. And for clarity, it should be noted that modernization and availability make it difficult for eating the locusts at this present time.

Field report on health reform practise among the Seventh Day Adventists Ilishan-Remo

Question	F & % SA	F & % A	F & % NS	F & % D	F & % SD
Health Reform in the Seventh-Day Adventist Church came as a result of health challenges among church members	26(26%)	35(35%)	23(23%)	9(9.0%)	7(7.0%)
A natural diet (Locusts, honey, Vegetables, Fruits, Nuts and Grains) is recommended for Church members in the Health Reform	48(48%)	47(47%)	3(3.0%)	1(1.0%)	1(1.0%)
Natural diet in the Seventh-Day Adventist Church is only recommended in the Health Reform Message and not a doctrine	57(57%)	29(29%)	8(8.0%)	4(4.0%)	2(2.0%)
The practice of eating a natural diet in the Seventh-Day Adventist Church is not forced on members but optional as a matter of choice	80(80%)	17(17%)	2(2.0%)	1(1.0%)	Nil

From the table, the results show that the number and percentage of respondents who agreed and strongly agreed are far above the number and percentage of those who are not sure (NS), disagreed (D) and strongly, put together, which is in agreement that the teaching and practice of eating natural diet is not a doctrine of the Seventh-Day Adventist Church and not forced on any member of the Church, rather recommended. Hence, the practice hangs on individual choices.

Understanding of natural diet in the Gospel of Matthew among the Seventh-Day Adventists

The Seventh Day-Adventist Church, Ilishan Remo, Ogun State, is made up of three Districts which comprise Ilishan North District, Ilishan West District and Babcock University District. These Districts by way of grouping belong to the Ogun Conference in the Western Nigerian Union Conference of the Seventh-Day Adventist Church, Nigeria.

The understanding of a natural diet in the Gospel of Matthew among the Seventh-Day Adventists can be seen from the results of the findings, from the data provided by the

respondents as they respond to the questions on the said title, starting from the general beliefs on a plant-based diet (Natural diet) to that of Matthew's Gospel.

General beliefs on a Natural diet

Question	F & % SA	F & % A	F & % NS	F & % D	F & % SD
A natural diet (including locusts and honey) has healing properties	81(81%)	18(18%)	1(1.0%)	Nil	Nil
Persons with an ulcer, diabetes, obesity, cardiovascular diseases, etc., can be cured by placing them on a natural diet	63(63%)	30(30%)	6(6.0%)	1(1.0%)	Nil
Fruits, vegetables and herbs promote good health	88(88%)	11(11%)	1(1.0%)	Nil	Nil
Beans and soya beans can supply enough protein in place of meat and fish	59(59%)	35(35%)	3(3.0%)	3(3.0%)	Nil
A natural diet is less in cholesterol than fish and meat	70(70%)	22(22%)	6(6.0%)	2(2.0%)	Nil
The method of using a chemical in fishing and animal feeds can lead to problems	74(74%)	24(24%)	Nil	Nil	2(2.0 %)
Millions of lives can be saved when natural diets are taken other than diseased meat and fish	79(79%)	20(22%)	1(1.0%)	Nil	Nil

The agreement of the respondents from the above table, (those who agreed (strongly) against, NT, D and SD), show that a natural diet with its healing properties can be used in healing lifestyle diseases and cardiovascular diseases based on their understanding of the importance of natural diet and healing powers, which like medicine, contains substances that produce pharmacological effects similar to any other medication, and have the power to prevent and correct diseases, with no side effect(Pamplona-Roger 2012:16). With all these, there is no doubt that a plant-based diet promotes good health as attested to by the respondents.

On the other hand, it will be totally out of place to say that fish and meat do not supply protein, but the health risk associated with flesh makes it unparalleled to compete with plant-based foods that have little or no side effects. Unlike the protein founds in fish and meat, the protein founds in natural diet, especially vegetables, fruits, grains and legumes are superior in the sense that it constitutes essential nutrients such as methionine and lysine, complete nutrients rarely found in fish and meat(Pamplona-Roger 2012:31). And worthy to note is that no natural diet including honey contains cholesterol, even the ones rich in fats such as nuts have no cholesterol, and instead, they help reduce the blood cholesterol levels. This is not so with fish and meat or with foods of animal origin. All contain cholesterol except for honey.

Beliefs and agreement on Matthean Natural diet

Question	F & % SA	F & % A	F & % NS	F & % D	F & % SD
Matthew 3:4 discusses the health benefits of a natural diet	50(50%)	36(36%)	11(11%)	3(3.0%)	Nil
Matthew 3:4 can also be used to promote the use of a natural diet	48(48%)	43(43%)	7(7.0%)	1(1.0%)	1(1.0%)
I am aware that it was not God's original plan for man to kill animals for food	82(82%)	12(12%)	3(3.0%)	Nil	3(3.0%)
The consumption of flesh came after sin Genesis 9:3,4	83(83%)	15(15%)	1(1.0%)	1(1.0%)	Nil

From the above table, the results (those who agreed (strongly) against, NT, D and SD), show the respondents' understanding of natural diet in Matthew 3:4.This perception of the respondents corroborates the submission of White on an exclusive natural diet when she adopted Peter Stuhlmacher's theory to foreground that the Bible accounts for a natural diet (Genesis 2:9; Leviticus 11: 22; Matthew 3:4). White claims that in the Garden of Eden before sin, the natural diet was given to serve as food. In the Eden home, God provided the fruits and leaves of the tree of life (a natural diet) for Adam and Eve; He warned them against eating a fleshy diet to prevent themselves from welcoming sin, lest they be immortal sinners (White 1890:61-62).But after the fall of humanity and in the end, God will restore the earth– the New Jerusalem(Those fruits and leaves of the tree of life (natural diet) will serve as food in the New Jerusalem that will be void of shedding of blood – animals, fishes and humans) and will freely give it to the redeemed to access (Anderson 1961:204). This account explicates the original plan of God that animals must not be killed for food as seen in the table. It was so because, since there was no sin, no death was ever recorded and fruits and herbs were abundant, there was no need for animal killing as food in place of God's provision for Adam and Eve. Hence, the killing of animals for food beckoned sin, especially when Noah came out of the ark (Genesis 9:3,4).

Conclusion

The paper has brought to the fore John the Baptist's chosen natural diet in Matthew 3:4 contributed to his physical healthy living and spiritual upliftment. Failure to make the right dietary choice led to the fall of humanity from glorious distinction to ignominious extinction. The paper reveals that a natural diet promotes healthy living and has higher nutritional value than meat and fish. While a natural diet has little or no cholesterol, a fleshy diet has saturated fat and creates the risk of the direct transfer of diseases (cardiovascular diseases) and toxins (mercury) from meat and fish to humans when not properly cooked, which later results in cancer, tumour, diabetes and cardiovascular diseases(hypertension, high blood pressure, obesity, etc.) No wonder the Seventh-Day Adventists, Ilishan-Remo upholds the Health Reform teaching on a natural diet, practises and recommends it to its members. Therefore, living on a natural diet is of great importance to humans owing to its response to the health principles on food, appetite, dietary choice and obedience that God desires from humans as enshrined in Matthew 3:4, the paper recommends.

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