The Term ṭhōrâ in Genesis 7:2: 
A Linguistic Study

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The first distinction between clean and unclean animals is found in Gen 7:2, a text that is assigned by historical-critical scholars to the J source. Almost all scholars—Jews or Christians—put the laws about permitted or forbidden animals into the category of ceremonial or cultic law. J. Moskala, in his review of literature of the Mosaic laws regarding dietary prohibitions, classifies various interpretations thematically and evaluates them in the light of recent exegetical and theological scholarly discussion. In today’s discussion of the topic, most Jewish and Christian scholars—both conservative and historical-critical—support the abolition of the laws regarding clean and unclean animals/food.


3 See J. Moskala, *The Laws of Clean & Unclean Animals in Leviticus 11: Their Nature, Theology, and Rationale*, ATSDS 4 (Berrien Springs: ATSP, 2000), 112–49. This author outlines the following fourteen theories: The Arbitrary Command explanation, the Cultic explanation, the Sociological explanation, the Symbolic explanation, the Didactic explanation, the Psychical/Repulsiveness explanation, the Taboo and Totemism explanation, the Death-Life Antithesis explanation, the Anthropological explanation, the Nature/Culture Boundary explanation, the Ethical/Moral explanation, the Sacrificial Paradigm explanation, the Economic explanation, and the Hygienic/Health explanation.

Our interest is focused on a linguistic study of Gen 7:2 concentrating on the major term of this text in the Hebrew Bible. The purpose of this article is to study the meaning and usage of the Hebrew term ʼhôrâ (“clean”) in ancient Near Eastern literature and in the OT and to ascertain its theological meaning in Gen 7:2.

The Literary Structure of Genesis 7:2

The literary structure of Gen 7:2 presents three alternating microstructures: A B C // A’ B’ C’.

A “You shall take with you seven each of” tiqqah- ʼl-kâ ʼsîb- ʼnā ʼsîb- ʼnā
B “every clean animal” mikôl hab’hêmâ haﬀ-hôrâ
C “a male and his female” ſî wʼôṣîdô
A’ “two each of” hiw- ʼs’nayim
B’ “animals that are unclean” ʻûmin-hab’hêma “šer lôv ʼhôrâ
C’ “a male and his female,”5 ſî wʼôṣîdô

There is a synonymous parallelism between A “You shall take with you seven each of” [tiqqah- ʼl-kâ ʼsîb- ʼnā ʼsîb- ʼnā] // A’ “two each of” [hiw- ʼs’nayim], especially between “seven each of” [ʼsîb- ʼnā ʼsîb- ʼnā] // “two each of” [hiw- ʼs’nayim].6 The antithetical, semantic, and a precise positive-negative syntactical parallelism is evident between B “every clean animal” [mikôl hab’hêmâ haﬀ-hôrâ] // B’ “animals that are unclean” [ʻûmin-hab’hêma “šer lôv ʼhôrâ]. In both cases, at a semantic level, the lines refer to “animals” [hab’hêmâ]. On the syntactic level, there is a preposition+noun+adjective // preposition+noun+adjective parallelism, but with the components in the positive-negative case.7 Finally, we also observe a synonymous, grammatical, and syntactical parallelism between C “a male and his female” [ʃî wʼôṣîdô] // C’ “a male and his female” [ʃî wʼôṣîdô]. This parallelism can be observed at a grammatical level between the nouns ʃî and ʼôṣîdô, ʃî is a noun masculine singular in both microstructures, and ʼôṣîdô is also a noun feminine singular construct in both microsections. On the syntactic level, there is a noun+noun construct (+suffix) // noun+noun construct (+suffix) parallelism in both microstructures.8

5NKJV.
6As Watson points out when referring to the parallel types of words: “synonymous word-pairs comprise a large class with a broad spectrum . . . Its components are synonyms or near-synonyms and therefore almost interchangeable in character”; see W. G. E. Watson, Classical Hebrew Poetry, JSOT Supplement Series 26 (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1986), 131.
7In Watson’s words: “antonymic word-pairs are made up of words opposite in meaning and are normally used in antithetic parallelism” (ibid.).
8For a study of biblical grammatical, semantic, and syntactic parallelism, see A. Berlin, The Dynamics of Biblical Parallelism (Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1985), 31–102.
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The Term Ð³hôrâ in Ancient Near Eastern Literature

Egyptian. Egyptian Ï· means both “purify” and “be or become pure”; it is also used as the adjective “pure.” In its transitive sense, the verb is sometimes used concretely—“wash,” “make clean” (e.g. clothing)—sometimes figuratively—“purify” (e.g., the king, priests, a temple, or an altar), that is, make free from impurity or evil. In the sense “be pure,” it is used of persons, parts of the body, clothing, buildings, sacrifices, etc. As an adjective, Ï· exhibits a semantic shift from “pure” = “clean” to “pure” = “consecrated, sacred” and to “pure” = “unused.” It is applied to persons, objects of all kinds, buildings, localities, etc.9

Akkadian. The Akkadian word for “pure” is ebu(m)10 or ellu(m) 11; the two are largely synonymous. The former (equivalent to Sum. [DADAG,(GA)]) means “gleaming” (metals, gold, precious stones, wood), “clean” (clothing), “sacred” or “pure” (objects, materials, or animals for cultic use; also ritual and divine beings), and “trustworthy.” The latter (equivalent to Sum. [KU; SIKIL]) can also mean “gleaming” (precious stones, light, a face); it can also mean “pure” (gold, naphtha, oil, etc.). It is often applied to objects, materials, or animals used in the cult; it indicates the ritual purity of a person, and it has a meaning that comes close to the concept “holy,” as applied to gods, kings, priests, their acts, dwellings places, etc. Incantations, for example, may be called “pure” or “holy.”12

The verb ebeœbu(m)13 “to be (come) bright, pure” and elêlu(m) 14 “to be (come) pure, free” are likewise largely synonymous and often appear together. The former means in the G stem “be clean” of hands, “clear” of illness, impurity, omen, “be free” of claims; it means in the D stem [DADAG] “cleanse,” “purify (ritually),” “keep pure”; it means in the Dt stem [DADAG] “be purified, cleared.”15 The latter also means in the G stem [KU] of ominous sign “be clear”; “be pure” cultically, of person, incantation; “be free” from claims; it means in the D stem [KU] “purify” weapons in the sea; “body,” mouth, hands; of deity, “purify” humans, heaven by magic; “carry out purely” ritual, offering; “dedicate by purification”; it means in the Dt stem “purify oneself,” “be purified.”16

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10. AHw, 1:180; CAD, 4:1–4; J. Black, A. George and N. Postgate (eds.), A Concise Dictionary of Akkadian (CDA), SANTAG 5 (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 1999), 64.
11. AHw, 1:204f.; CAD, 4:102–06; CDA, 70.
13. AHw, 1:180f.; CAD, 4:4–8; CDA, 64.
15. CDA, 64; see also J. Huehnergard, A Grammar of Akkadian, HSS 45 (Atlanta: Scholars, 1997), 492.
16. CDA, 69; see also Huehnergard, 493.
Ugaritic. The Ugaritic term equivalent to the Hebrew term 'hōrā is the root ḫhr (var. ḫhr), which appears in Ugaritic literature in the plural form. The basic meaning of adjective ḫhr is the same as the Hebrew adjective ḫhārā, “pure.”

The word ḫhr appears in the cycle of “the Palace of Baal” in KTU 1.4 V 18–19 and KTU 1.4 V 33–35:

\[ \text{wbn.bht.ksp.whrs} \text{ and (so) build a mansion of silver and gold,} \]
\[ \text{bht.thrm.iqnim} \text{ a mansion of brilliant stones (and) lapis-lazuli.} \]
\[ \text{wbn.bht.ksp}^{24} \text{whrs. and (so) build a mansion of silver and gold,} \]
\[ \text{bht.thrm.}^{21} \text{iqnim a mansion of brilliant stones (and) lapis-lazuli.} \]

\[ \text{f'hōrā in the Old Testament} \]

The term ḫhārā appears in Gen 7:22 in the statement: “Of every clean [ḥhārā] beast thou shalt take to thee by sevens, the male and his female; and of beasts that are not clean [ḥhārā] by two, the male and his female.” The LXX usually uses katharos and katharizein to translate ḫhr and its derivatives, while the Vulgate has mundis. All the major English versions translate ḫhārā with “clean.”

The root ḫhr and its derivatives occur 206 times in the OT. The verb ḫahr occurs 94 times (34 times in the Qal, 39 times in the Piel, 1 time in the Pual, and 20 times in the Hithpael), ḫār appears 95 times, ḫɔhr 3 times, ḫhɔrā 13 times, and ḫhār 1 time. The adjective feminine singular ḫhārā has been defined as

\[ \text{See S. Segert, A Basic Grammar of the Ugaritic Language (Berkeley: U of California P, 1984), 162, 187 (1.4.V:19).} \]
\[ \text{See M. Dietrich, O. Loretz, and J. Sanmartin, Die keilalphabetischen Texte aus Ugaritic, ALASP 8 (Münster: Ugarit-Verlag, 1995), 19.} \]
\[ \text{Ibid.} \]
\[ \text{J. C. L. Gibson, Canaanite Myths and Legends (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1978), 61; G. Del Olmo Lete, Mitos y Leyendas de Canaán (Madrid: Cristiandad, 1981), 203. Gibson points out ḫhr as “clean, brilliant” (ibid., 147), and Del Olmo Lete as “pure, brilliant” (ibid., 555). See also G. Del Olmo Lete & J. Sanmartin, Diccionario de la Lengua Ugarítica, Aula Orientalis Supplementa 8 (Barcelona: Ausa, 2000), 2:480, “pure, brilliant.”} \]
\[ \text{KJV.} \]
\[ \text{A. Rahlfis, Septuaginta (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 1979).} \]
\[ \text{ASV; NIV; NKJV; RSV; RSV.} \]
\[ \text{A. Even-Shoshan, A New Concordance of the Old Testament (Jerusalem: Kiryat Sefer, 1990), 409–10.} \]

Some cultic utensils are to be made of zāhāb tāhōr (“pure gold”). In the regulations governing the making of the tabernacle[34] and the account of its construction,[35] the term zāhāb tāhōr alternates with simple zāhāb (“gold”). The ark is to be overlaid with zāhāb tāhōr,[36] the kappōret is to be fashioned of zāhāb tāhōr,[37] as is the table.[38] Cultic vessels are also to be made of zāhāb tāhōr.[39]

Several passages speak of zāhāb tāhōr as the material of the lampstand.[40] Finally, the snuffers and trays are of zāhāb tāhōr,[41] and the incense altar is overlaid with it.[42] There are also references to zāhāb tāhōr in the context of the priestly vestments and their fashioning;[43] two chains for the ephod,[44] two chains for the breastpiece,[45] bells on the skirts of the outer robe,[46] and a plate with the inscription qōdeš lēyhwh.[47] There are synonyms suggesting that the expression zāhāb tāhōr refers to pure, unalloyed gold.[48] Certain cultic objects are referred to expressly as “clean” or “pure.” These include the table for the showbread[49]

27BDB, 373.
34Exod 25; 30:3.
41Exod 25:29; 37:16.
43Exod 25:38; 37:23.
44Exod 30:3; 37:26.
45Exod 28:2; 39.
46Exod 28:14.
47Exod 28:22; 39:15, 17.
48Exod 39:25.
49Exod 28:36; 39:30.
501 Kgs 7:50 (zāhāb sāqūr); 1 Kgs 10:18 (zāhāb māpāt); 1 Chron 28:18 (zāhāb m’suqqāy); 2 Chron 3:5, 8 (zāhāb tōb).
51Lev 24:6; 2 Chron 13:11.
and the lampstand, and the incense is to be both ṭāhôr ("pure") and qôdeš ("holy"). ṭbr is applied in the OT to corporal, moral, and religious purity. Synonyms of ṭbr are almost always used to fix moral purity: brr Niphal ("be pure, keep pure"), bar ("pure"), barur ("pure, clean"), bôr ("purity"), zkî Qal ("be pure"), Piel ("keep pure"), Hithpael ("to purify"), zkk Qal ("be clean, healthy"), Hiphil ("make pure"), zak ("clean, pure"). It is evident that pure (tbr) and holy (qôdsû) appear close joined in the OT texts, while pure (tbr [clean]) and unclean (tm) always appear as opposite terms.

It is the function of the priests to distinguish (hîbdîl [bdîl]) between the clean and the unclean. There are clean and unclean animals listed in Lev 11. The law governing clean and unclean animals is intended to distinguish ṭăhôr ("clean"), those that may be eaten, from ṭûmê ("unclean"), those that may not be eaten. The general principle that something unclean does not produce something clean is found in Job 14:4: the unclean human race cannot bring forth a single individual who is clean in the eyes of God; therefore the distinction between clean and unclean is only found in God. Only those who are clean may take part in the cult. All who are clean may eat the flesh of the sacrifice; whoever eats of it while unclean shall be cut off from the community. Some cultic acts can be performed only by a "clean man" (îṣ ṭôhôr). A priest who is clean may eat of the wave offering, of the firstfruits, and of the holy things (qôdâšîm). Cultic ceremonies are to be performed at a "clean place" (mâqôm ṭâhôr).

In the writings of Qumran, the Manual of Discipline and sometimes the Damascus Document speak of “the purity of the many” (ṭôh’rat hârâbbîm) (1QS...
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6:16, 25; 7:3, 16, 19), or “the purity of the holy men” (tōh’rat ‘anšē haggōdeš) (1QS 5:13; 8:17), or simply tōh’rat (1QS 6:22; 7:25; 8:24; CD 9:21, 23) as something that outsiders are forbidden to touch. The Hodayoth contain several occurrences of the verb ‚hər, mostly in the Piel, with reference to cleansing from sin and iniquity ‘āwōn (1QH 1:32), peša‘ (1QH 3:21; 7:30; 11:10), ‘ašmā (1QH 4:37; 6:8). According to 1QH 3:21, the result of this cleansing is incorporation into the community. Finally, 1QH 16:12 states that the cleansing takes place through the holy spirit of God. The Temple scroll contains many additional occurrences.72 To conclude, we must point out that in the Targums, the Talmudic, and the Midrashic literature, ‚hōr, ‚thōrā is interpreted as “clean, pure.”73

The Theological Meaning of Gen 7:2

The setting of all of Genesis 1–11 is universal in outlook.74 The distinction between clean and unclean is important in this early time and universal context. Not only were clean animals and birds used for sacrifice (Gen 8:20), but after the Flood, humans were permitted to eat animals (Gen 9:3–5). The implication is that they were permitted to eat only clean animals. Therefore, the distinction between clean and unclean animals is known before the Israelites came into existence, in a universal passage and context. It can, consequently, be maintained that the distinction between clean and unclean animals is applicable to humankind in general. These dates support the idea that the distinction between clean and unclean animals is not the product of Hebrew cultic legislation, but precedes it into antediluvian times. The clean/unclean animal distinction is joined to other fundamental institutions that antedate Israelite times and are traced back to the history of beginnings, such as marriage (Gen 2:8–15), the Sabbath (Gen 2:1–3), and the like.75

The distinction between clean and unclean animals in the time prior to Noah was made primarily for the purpose of human food/diet and not for ceremonial or cultic reasons.76 Sacrifices were taken only from among the clean animals, but only a few clean animals were used in the sacrificial services.77

We think that goodness and holiness constitute the two main concepts of the theology of Gen 7:2.

72TDOT, 5:295–96; see also Jenni and Westermann, 1:901.
73M. Jastrow, A Dictionary of the Targumim, the Talmud Babli and Yerushalmi, and the Midrashic Literature (New York: Judaica, 1992), 520.
75See Wenham, 177.
76For an analysis of the reasons, see Moskala, 248–49.
77Three species of animal (cattle, sheep, and goats: Lev 9:2–4; Exod 29:38–39, 42; etc) and two species of birds (turtledove and pigeon: Lev 1:14; 5:7).
Goodness. We may observe a goodness background. Goodness is linked to Creation by the use of the Hebrew term ṭōḇ ("good") in Genesis 1 (see Gen 1:21, 25), an adjective masculine singular like the adjective feminine singular ṭḥōrā ("clean, pure") of Gen 7:2.  

We suggest that there is a synonymous parallelism between ṭḥōrā (Gen 7:2) and ṭōḇ (Gen 1). It is very significant that the distinction between clean and unclean animals does not start with Creation in Genesis 1, but was known in the antediluvian world after the Fall. Consequently, we think that the use of the Hebrew term ṭḥōrā in Gen 7:2 has to do with those animals called ṭōḇ in Gen 1:21, 25; it is to say, with the clean animals of Creation, those not affected (or less affected) by the Fall (see Gen 3:14).

Holiness. The second main concept of the theology of Gen 7:2 is a holiness background. We suggest that there is a linguistic connection between Gen 7:2 and Gen 2:2–3 (the Creation account). This suggestion is due to the specific terms used: šûbšîb ("seven pairs"; 7:2), šḇḇt ("seventh") and yʹqadeš ("to consecrate, sanctify, be holy") Piel imperfect; Gen 2:2–3).

The Hebrew terms used in Gen 7:2 are šnayim ("two [pair]"), and šibšīb ("seven pairs," lit. "seven seven," i.e., fourteen animals of each clean species—explicitly stated "the male and his mate"; 7:2). Thus one pair of unclean animals, i.e., two—male and female—and seven pairs of clean animals entered into the ark. The linguistic relationship between šḇḇt ("seventh [day]") of Gen 2:2–3 and šibšīb ("seven seven [pairs]"") of Gen 7:2 is very significant. This linguistic connection links holiness, seventh day, and seven pairs of clean animals, and we think it is a strong evidence that this law is a part of universal law.

The concept of holiness is linked to Creation by the use of the Hebrew terms šḇḇt ("seventh") and yʹqadeš ("to consecrate, sanctify, be holy") in Gen 2:2–3. The root qdš is used for the first time in connection with Creation. The Creator made the Sabbath holy. Holiness in relation to the dietary laws means to preserve God’s given order of life within its boundaries. Holiness is thus the

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78So God created great sea creatures and every living thing that moves, with which the waters abounded, according to their kind, and every winged bird according to its kind. And God saw that it was good. And God made the beast of the earth according to its kind, cattle according to its kind, and everything that creeps on the earth according to its kind. And God saw that it was good (Gen 1:21, 25, NKJV; emphasis added).

79So the Lord God said to the serpent: ‘Because you have done this, you are cursed more than all cattle, and more than every beast of the field; on your belly you shall go, and you shall eat dust all the days of your life’ (Gen 3:14, NKJV; emphasis added).

80And on the seventh day God ended His work which He had done, and He rested on the seventh day from all His work which He had done. Then God blessed the seventh day and sanctified it, because in it He rested from all His work which God had created and made” (Gen 2:2–3, NKJV; emphasis added).

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The supreme motive of this law.\(^8\)\(^2\) It is highly significant that this great emphasis on holiness is not to the same extent found with any other laws.

Genesis 7:2 shows that Noah is presumed to be able to distinguish between clean (edible) and unclean (inedible) animals.\(^8\)\(^3\) Ceremonially clean animals would be needed also for the burnt offerings that Noah would sacrifice (Gen 8:20) and for food (Gen 9:3). Consequently, clean animals were saved in seven pairs so that they could be used for sacrifices and for food.

**Conclusion**

Proceeding from the analysis we have carried out of the literary structure of Gen 7:2 in alternating microstructures, we think we have shown the structural, literary, and linguistic unity of the microsections of this text. Also, we have tried to demonstrate by means of a linguistic and theological study that this verse is key to explaining the distinction between clean and unclean animals as a part of universal law applicable to humankind in general.

As we have seen, the purpose of this article was to study the meaning and usage of the Hebrew term †hôrôâ (“clean, pure”) of Gen 7:2 in ancient Near Eastern literature and in the OT and to know the theological meaning of Gen 7:2. It indicated that goodness and holiness constitute the two main concepts of the theology of Gen 7:2. Moreover, we suggest that the concepts of goodness and holiness are both linked to Creation because of the linguistic connection between Gen 7:2 and Gen 1:21, 25; 2:2–3 (the Creation account) by the use of the synonymous and parallel Hebrew terms †ôb (“good”; Gen 1:21, 25) and ñbêî (“seventh”; Gen 2:2–3).

The terminology of clean/unclean animals appears for the first time in the Hebrew Bible in the Flood account in Gen 7:2. This background is very significant, because it shows that the distinction between clean and unclean animals did not originate with Moses and the nation of Israel, but rather with or before Noah (patriarchal period); it is pre-Mosaic, even though the list of clean/unclean animals is specified only in Lev 11 and Deut 14.

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\(^8\)\(^3\)See Wenham, 176.