

Genesis 7:1-2

“Clean and Unclean Animals on Noah’s Ark”

“Then the LORD said to Noah, ‘Enter the ark, you and all your household, for you *alone* I have seen *to be* righteous before Me in this time. You shall take with you of every clean animal by sevens, a male and his female; and of the animals that are not clean two, a male and his female.’”

In the account of Noah’s Flood, it is obviously important to recognize the righteousness of Noah and his family (Genesis 7:1), which caused them to be saved from the impending disaster. In his construction of the ark, which was to preserve both his family and the animals (Genesis 6:15-22), most Bible readers are only aware of how Noah was directed to take two of every pair of animal to preserve,¹ as stated by Genesis 6:19-20:

“And of every living thing of all flesh, you shall bring two of every *kind* into the ark, to keep *them* alive with you; they shall be male and female. Of the birds after their kind, and of the animals after their kind, of every creeping thing of the ground after its kind, two of every *kind* will come to you to keep *them* alive.”

Noah is further instructed to take enough food for himself and the animals (Genesis 6:21), presumably agricultural produce. As the narrative continues, though, the Lord directs, “Of every clean animal take unto you seven pairs, a male with its mate, and of the animal that is not clean, two, a male with its mate” (Genesis 7:2, ATS). Genesis 7:2 directs readers to a distinction between animals that are “clean” or *tahor* (טָהוֹר), of which seven pairs were to be brought aboard the ark, and animals that are unclean, more specifically “not clean” or *lo tehovah* (לֹא טָהוֹרָה), of which only a single pair was to be brought aboard. Readers of Genesis 7:1-2 have to recognize that the clean and unclean animals, brought aboard Noah’s ark, are classified according to the distinctions that will be listed later in the Torah, in Leviticus 11 and Deuteronomy 14.²

How and/or why Noah knew distinctions, between clean and unclean animals, has been a cause for some speculation among examiners across the theological spectrum. There is certainly some exaggerated Rabbinic speculation that Noah knew the whole of the Torah’s code.³ The critical tradition, which views the Torah as a product of the post-Babylonian exile via the redaction together of the presumed JEDP sources,⁴ posits that Genesis 7:1-5 was a product of the so-called J source or Yahwist,⁵ and with the clean-unclean distinctions anachronistically read into the events of a prior historical period. Conservative examiners of Genesis 7:1-2, who hold to principal Mosaic authorship of the Torah, have to recognize that there was some kind of distinction between clean and unclean animals—likely orally communicated by God to the righteous people He would fellowship with, like Noah—prior to the formal codification of the Torah at Mount Sinai.

The main reason why there were seven pairs of clean animals taken aboard the ark by Noah is specified later in Genesis 8:20 at the conclusion of the disaster: “Then Noah built an altar to the LORD, and took of every clean animal and of every clean bird and offered burnt offerings on the altar.” The clean and unclean distinctions among these animals is principally cultic, as the clean

¹ It does have to be noted that there are disagreements among Young Earth Creationists and Old Earth Creationists over how extensive the Flood was, and thusly whether *absolutely* every kind of animal species was preserved aboard the ark, or *just* every animal species associated with humanity. In the latter view, Noah’s Flood, while an ecological catastrophe, was limited to the Ancient Near East and/or however far humanity had spread across the planet.

² Cf. Allen P. Ross, “Genesis,” in John F. Walvoord and Roy B. Zuck, eds., *The Bible Knowledge Commentary, Old Testament* (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1985), 38.

³ Cf. Cohen, 37.

⁴ For a brief conservative summary and refute, consult “The Documentary Hypothesis,” in Duane A. Garrett, ed., et. al., *NIV Archaeological Study Bible* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2005), 15.

This is also discussed in the workbook *A Survey of the Tanach for the Practical Messianic* by J.K. McKee.

⁵ Cf. Von Rad, *Genesis*, 119; Levenson, in *The Jewish Study Bible*, 22; Richard Elliot Friedman, *The Bible with Sources Revealed* (New York: HarperCollins, 2003), 43.

Genesis 7:1-2 Eating and Kosher in the Tanach

animals were viewed as being those acceptable for sacrifice before God. Yet, there are those, in weighing the fact that seven pairs of clean animals went aboard the ark, and only single pairs of unclean animals went aboard, who have to consider whether or not the former would also be used for food. T. Desmond Alexander has a fairly general view of the options before the interpreter:

"Since after the flood some clean animals will be offered as sacrifices (see Gen. 8:20) and some will be eaten as food (see 9:3), to ensure their survival it was necessary to have more than one pair of each kind in the ark."⁶

The issue in view for seven pairs of clean animals brought aboard the ark is principally for sacrifice,⁷ which is widely recognized by conservative examiners. The *IVPBBC* sees the thrust of Genesis 7:1-2 and 8:20 as only involving animal sacrifices, though, and not necessarily the future permission granted to human beings to eat meat:

"The distinction between clean and unclean animals was not an innovation established at Sinai but is seen as early as Noah. Evidence from Egypt and Mesopotamia offer no system equivalent to the Israelite system of classification. While there are dietary restrictions in those cultures, they tend to be much more limited, that is, certain animals restricted only to certain classes of people or on certain days of the month. Even here one cannot assume that the classification has implications for their diet. Up to this time no permission had been granted to eat meat (see 1:29). When meat was granted to them as food after the flood (9:2-3), there were no restrictions along the lines of clean and unclean. As a result it appears that the classification concerned sacrifice, not diet, in this period."⁸

But can eating be totally excluded from the discussion? Gordon Wenham is one who draws the conclusion that if single-pair unclean animals were eaten by Noah and company, that they would actually be responsible for the extinction of certain animal species. He even issues the further thought that Noah and company observed some kind of "sabbath" while on the ark:

"Without extra pairs of these creatures sacrifice would have entailed the extinction of the clean birds and animals, the only types permitted to be sacrificed...It is characteristic of Gen 1-11 to trace back the fundamental religious institutions to primeval times: Sabbath (2:1-3); the Garden of Eden, the ideal sanctuary (2-3); sacrifice (4:1-8); and here the difference between clean and unclean. As a righteous and blameless man, Noah knew the difference between clean and unclean and the necessity of sacrifice. Furthermore, the timetable of the flood with its seven-day periods of waiting may indicate that he observed the Sabbath."⁹

Even when holding to various presuppositions associated with the JEDP documentary hypothesis, Richard Elliot Friedman similarly states, "Noah takes seven pairs of the 'pure' animals and only one pair of the 'not pure,' because he will offer sacrifices after the flood. If he were to have only two sheep, then his sacrifice would wipe out the species."¹⁰

John H. Sailhamer seems to not have any objections to the idea that the seven pairs of clean animals would also have been used by Noah for eating, but directs readers' attention more to the connection between Noah being safely aboard the ark and the future relationship Ancient Israel would have in meeting God in the Tabernacle:

"The specific mention of the 'clean animals' (*habb^ehēmāh haṭṭ^ehōrāh* [הַבְּהֵמָה הַטְּהוֹרָה], v.2) that Noah took with him into the ark is perhaps intended to suggest that while in the ark he ate only

⁶ Alexander, in *ESV Study Bible*, 62.

⁷ Sarna, *Genesis*, 54.

⁸ John H. Walton, Victor H. Matthews, and Mark W. Chavalas, *The IVP Bible Background Commentary: Old Testament* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2000), 38; cf. Hartley, *Genesis*, 103; John H. Walton, *NIV Application Commentary: Genesis* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2001), 313.

⁹ Wenham, *Genesis 1-15*, pp 176-177.

Matthews, *Genesis 1-11:26*, 372 also states, "It is consistent with what we have found in Genesis that later Israelites recognize themselves and their own experiences in the primeval events of the world."

¹⁰ Richard Elliot Friedman, *Commentary on the Torah* (New York: HarperCollins, 2001), 37.

Messianic Kosher Helper

'clean meat,' as is the requirement in the tabernacle (Lev 7:19-21). Such parallels suggest that the author has intentionally drawn a comparison between the salvation that lies in the ark of Noah during the impending 'forty days and forty nights' of rain (v.4) and the salvation in the presence of the tabernacle during the covenant relationship that lies behind the author's work."¹¹

There is sufficient textual evidence in Genesis 7:1-2 to suggest that in addition to the clean animals brought aboard the ark, that such animals would have also been the principal sources of animal food, once the prohibition on eating animal meat was lifted (Genesis 9:2-4). Again, though, simply because there are an entire range of animals that are classified as either "not clean" or "unclean," does not all of a sudden mean that such animals are "evil" or unvalued by God. Victor P. Hamilton correctly directs our attention,

"The entire OT places a prohibition on eating what is unclean (Deut. 4:3-20; Judg. 13:4, 7, 14; 1 Sam 20:26; 2 Chr. 30:18-19; Ezek. 4:14). Yet these unclean animals are spared from drowning. They are as much an object of Yahweh's compassion as is Noah himself. If nothing else, their inclusion in those who are delivered is partial confirmation of the fact that in the OT 'sinful' is not normally a synonym for 'unclean,' especially in the cultic sections of the OT."¹²

Recognizing that the clean animals brought aboard the ark by Noah would have been not only among those sacrificed (Genesis 8:20), but also among those first eaten, will help readers to better understand the lifting of the prohibition upon eating meat in Genesis 9:2-4.

¹¹ Sailhamer, in *EXP*, 2:85.

¹² Victor P. Hamilton, *New International Commentary on the Old Testament: The Book of Genesis*, Chapters 1-17 (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990), pp 287-288.