

# Deuteronomy 14:11-18

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*Moses lists the unclean birds which the Israelites are prohibited from eating. He commands the people to eat any clean bird.*

In this section, Moses deals with the clean and the unclean birds. The people of God were given clear instructions regarding following a proper diet in order to obey and please their covenant God, Yahweh. Moses stated that the people were permitted to *eat any clean bird*. The adjective *clean* refers to that which is ceremonially or ritually pure; something that meets God's standard. The Hebrew word for *bird* is "šippôr," a term that usually refers to the chirping sound made by winged creatures. This definition is important for us later when we deal with the next section (vv. 19-20), where the NASB translates "bird" from a different Hebrew word.

In this section, Moses did not list the clean birds, only the unclean ones. This list contains at least twenty species that are fed on flesh (usually, on the decaying flesh of dead animals). These birds are technically called "carnivores." Moses began the list by saying that *these are the ones which you shall not eat*.

The list of birds to be avoided is as follows:

—The *eagle* (Heb. "nesher") is a powerful bird with a wingspan up to seven and a half feet. It hunts high in the air and swoops down on its prey at great speed. In ancient times, the eagle was known for its keen eyesight, power, and sharp beak and talons.

—The *vulture* (Heb, "pēres," only here and [Leviticus 11:13](#)) is a large, scavenging bird. It lives on dead flesh and is known for dropping animal remains from a great height in order to break the bones. It does not have strong claws to seize and tear its food, like the eagle.

—The *buzzard* (Heb. "oznîyâ") in this passage is debated as to which bird it refers to; it has been associated with the sea eagle, the osprey, or black vulture, though this cannot be determined for sure.

—The *red kite* (Heb. “rā’āh”) is a bird with long wings that soars around Palestine looking for garbage or dead flesh to eat. It is referred to only here and [Leviticus 11:14](#).

—The *falcon* (Heb. “ayyâ”) is a bird of prey with excellent eyesight, according to [Job 28:7](#).

—The *kite* (Heb. “dā’â”) is a large bird (more than two feet long). It is another bird of prey that flies high and can see far. It hunts small animals. The prohibition to eat kites included any kite *in their kinds*, meaning kites of all kinds (black, red, white, etc.) were not allowed for consumption.

—The *raven* (Heb. ‘ōrēb) (v. 14) is a large bird, considerably larger than the crow. Its feathers are black, glossy and beautiful. It always attacks the eye of an animal first, which explains the proverb: “The eye that mocks a father, and scorns a mother, the ravens of the valley will pick it out, and the young eagles will eat it” ([Proverbs 30:17](#)).

—The *ostrich* (Heb. “ya’anāh”) is a large bird that can go a long time without water, similar to a camel. It lives in the desert and sandy places.

—The *owl* (Heb. “taḥmās”) is a nocturnal bird of prey, meaning that it is active mainly during the night and sleeps during the day.

—The *sea gull* (Heb. “shaḥap”) is a bird that lives near bodies of water, hunting small fish.

—The *hawk* (Heb. “nēṣ”) here is mentioned in a grouping; the Israelites were not to eat the *hawk in their kinds*. This means any kind of hawk. Hawks are birds of prey that eat small animals and other birds. Some Bible translations put nightjars here, which are sometimes called nighthawks, though they aren’t hawks. Their coloring and long wingspan is hawk-like, but they are insect-eaters, hunting only at night and catching flies and moths with their gaping mouths.

—The *little owl* (Heb. “kōs”), the *great owl* (Heb. “yanshûp”) and the *white owl* (Heb. “tinshemet”) are all from the owl family.

—The *pelican* (Heb. “qā’at”) is a large aquatic bird. It lives on the seacoast, on the borders of lakes and rivers, and eats fish only.

—The *carrion vulture* (Heb. “rāḥām”) is a vulture that eats carrion, the decaying flesh of dead animals.

—The *cormorant* (Heb. “shālāk”) is a large, black, web-footed water fowl.

—The *stork* (Heb. “ḥâsidâ”) was also a carnivore. Its nest is large and flat, and made of sticks.

—The *heron* (Heb. “anāpāh”) is a long-necked wading bird. It also had long legs.

—The *hoopoe* (Heb. “dūkîpat”) is a singing bird, with a plumed head crest and a long, slender, curved bill.

—The *bat* (Heb. “ăṭallēp”) is, of course, not a bird, but rather a mouselike flying mammal with a furry body and membranous wings. Since it is a flying creature, it is placed in this category of prohibited animals.

The common characteristic of this list of 21 birds seems to be that they all fed on dead flesh. Apart from all the birds listed above, the Israelites were allowed to eat any other bird.

### **Biblical Text:**

**<sup>11</sup> You may eat any clean bird. <sup>12</sup> But these are the ones which you shall not eat: the eagle and the vulture and the buzzard, <sup>13</sup> and the red kite, the falcon, and the kite in their kinds, <sup>14</sup> and every raven in its kind, <sup>15</sup> and the ostrich, the owl, the sea gull, and the hawk in their kinds, <sup>16</sup> the little owl, the great owl, the white owl, <sup>17</sup> the pelican, the carrion vulture, the cormorant, <sup>18</sup> the stork, and the heron in their kinds, and the hoopoe and the bat.**