

Lev. 11:1

The Lord spoke to Moses and Aaron, saying to them: 2 Speak to the Israelite people thus:

...

Lev. 11:13

The following^b you shall abominate among the birds—they shall not be eaten, they are an abomination: the eagle [הַנְּשָׂרִי], the vulture [הַפֶּרֶס], and the black vulture [הַעֵזְזָנִיהָ].

^b A number of these cannot be identified with certainty.

Deut. 14:12

The following you may not eat: ^athe eagle, the vulture, and the black vulture. [same note]

HALOT **נְשָׂרִי**: eagle and vulture: Ex 19₄ Dt 28₄₉ 32₁₁, cj. 1S 26₂₀, 2S 1₂₃ (קלל), Jr 4₁₃ 48₄₀ 49₁₆₋₂₂ Ezk 1₁₀ 10₁₄ 17₃₋₇ Hos 8₁ (כְּנֶשֶׂר an eagle-like creature: Arb. *naššār* herald), Ob 4 Mi 1₁₆ (כְּרִהָה), Hab 1₈ Pr 23₅ 30₁₇₋₁₉ Jb 9₂₆ 39₂₇ Lam 4₁₉; unclean Lv 11₁₃ Dt 14₁₂; spread out the wings Is 40₃₁ and renew their youth (after moulting?), Ps 103₅ (see Tur-Sinai Job 415¹). †

DCH **נְשָׂרִי** 26.0.4 n.m. eagle—נְשָׂרִי; pl. נְשָׂרִים; cstr. נְשָׂרִי—bird of prey, whether eagle (e.g. Ex 19₄ Dt 32₁₄ 38₄₉ 2 S 1₂₃ Jr 4₁₃ Hb 1₈ Pr 23₅ La 4₉) or vulture (e.g. Jr 49₁₆ Ezk 17₃ Mc 1₁₆ Pr 30₁₇ Jb 39₂₇);* prohibited as food (Lv 11₁₃ Dt 14₁₂).
<SYN> אַרְיִי lion, אַרְיֵה lion, שׂוֹר ox, עֵגֶל calf, נָחָשׁ serpent, אָדָם human being, אָדָם man, כְּרוּב cherub, אֲנִיָּה ship.

Mic. 1:16

Shear off your hair and make yourself bald
For the children you once delighted in;
Make yourself as bald as a vulture,
For they have been banished from you.

[Philologos]

<http://web.archive.org/web/20051128114929/http://forward.com/issues/2000/00.10.20/arts4.html>

Michael Carasik writes from Philadelphia: “Not long ago my wife and I were at the Gamla Nature Reserve on the Golan Heights, where vultures nest. The park attendant was a woman from the Israel Nature Reserves Authority, who insisted that in modern Hebrew the word for ‘vulture’ is *neshar* and the word for ‘eagle,’ *ayit*. A number of bilingual Israelis standing by, some of them native English-speakers, claimed it was exactly the opposite, citing the biblical description of God’s bringing the children of Israel to the Promised Land *al kanfei nesharim*, ‘on the wings of eagles.’” He concludes, “Can you clear up the confusion?”

e-mail: torah-talk@earthlink.net

iTunes: <https://itunes.apple.com/us/podcast/torah-talk/id291683417>

web: <http://mcarasik.wordpress.com/category/podcast/>

RSS feed: <http://feeds.feedburner.com/TorahTalk>

Unless otherwise identified, English translations are from *Tanakh* by permission of the Jewish Publication Society.

<http://www.nebraskapress.unl.edu/product/Commentators-Bible-Leviticus.675296.aspx>

עֵיט

Gen. 15:11

Birds of prey came down upon the carcasses, and Abram drove them away.

Is. 18:6

They shall all be left
To the kites of the hills
And to the beasts of the earth;
The kites shall summer on them
And all the beasts of the earth shall winter on them.

Is. 46:11

I summoned that swooping bird from the East;
From a distant land, the man for My purpose.
I have spoken, so I will bring it to pass;
I have designed it, so I will complete it.

Jer. 12:9

My own people acts toward Me
Like a bird of prey [or] a hyena;
Let the birds of prey surround her!
Go, gather all the wild beasts,
Bring them to devour!

Ezek. 39:4

You shall fall on the mountains of Israel, you and all your battalions and the peoples who are with you; and I will give you as food to carrion birds of every sort and to the beasts of the field,

Job 28:7

No bird of prey knows the path to it;
The falcon's eye has not gazed upon it.

[Philologos]

The rabbis, too, were not certain what *ayit* meant. Although it appears clear from Genesis that it was some kind of scavenger, a description that fits the vulture but not the eagle, they left the matter open; some, like the medieval commentator David Kimhi, took *ayit* as a collective noun for scavenging birds of all kinds. Even in Eliezer Ben-Yehuda's monumental early 20th-century Hebrew dictionary, *ayit* is not defined as a specific species and its meaning of "vulture" in modern Hebrew is a recent one.

About *neshet*, however, there can be little doubt: Already in ancient times we find the rabbis calling it "the king of the birds," a title that was granted the eagle all over Europe and the Middle East and that would hardly have been accorded the carrion-eating vulture.

e-mail: torah-talk@earthlink.net

iTunes: <https://itunes.apple.com/us/podcast/torah-talk/id291683417>

web: <http://mearasik.wordpress.com/category/podcast/>

RSS feed: <http://feeds.feedburner.com/TorahTalk>

Unless otherwise identified, English translations are from *Tanakh* by permission of the Jewish Publication Society.

<http://www.nebraskapress.unl.edu/product/Commentators-Bible-Leviticus.675296.aspx>

[R. Natan Slifkin]

<http://zootorah.com/essays/the-identity-of-the-nesher>

Of the dozens of statements about the *nesher* in Scripture, there are several that do not match the eagle.

Some of these references speak of the *nesher* feeding on carrion:

Does the *nesher* rise up at your command, and make its nest on high? It dwells and abides on the rock, upon the crag of the rock, and the strong place. From there it seeks the prey, and its eyes behold from far away. Its young ones gulp blood; and where there are carcasses, there it is. (Job 39:27-30)

The eye that mocks at his father, and scorns to obey his mother, will be picked out by the ravens of the valley, and the young *nesher* shall eat it. (Proverbs 30:17)

Eagles do not usually feed on carrion; they generally take live prey, which they kill themselves. Vultures, on the other hand, are renowned for feeding on carrion, and the griffon vulture eats nothing else.

<http://www.haaretz.com/jewish/features/.premium-1.589507>

Officially, as we shall see, a nesher is a vulture. But ask the Israeli in the street what bird is found on the flags of Egypt, Mexico and several other countries, and they'll probably say nesher amerikai - though in fact the eagle is correctly referred to as a'it (a-YEET). [In Biblical Hebrew, at least, it is AY-eet.]

The word nesher appears 27 times in the Bible, where it clearly means vulture. Still, the first translators of the Bible from Hebrew and Aramaic, the Greek translators that created the Septuagint, got it wrong and wrote a'etos, which is the Greek word for eagle.

...

And there the matter rested until the summer of 1972. Once again the zoological camp tried to convince the linguists to accept what was already a fact among those who actually discuss birds - the nesher was a vulture. But the linguists would not have it and held a vote, deciding that it would remain the Hebrew word for eagle.

"It is true we have come to a decision, but what can we do - that is the language of zoologists, which will remain fixed anyway," Dr. Moshe Amikam warned. "The zoologists will continue to use their terms in their books despite our decision!"

Prof. Ze'ev Ben Haim, vice president of the academy tried to calm things down. "Following conversations with people," he said, "I can assume that the zoologists will eventually accede to the academy's decision."

It was not to be.

See also:

<http://www.balashon.com/2007/06/nesher-and-ayit.html>

e-mail: torah-talk@earthlink.net

iTunes: <https://itunes.apple.com/us/podcast/torah-talk/id291683417>

web: <http://mcarasik.wordpress.com/category/podcast/>

RSS feed: <http://feeds.feedburner.com/TorahTalk>

Unless otherwise identified, English translations are from *Tanakh* by permission of the Jewish Publication Society.

<http://www.nebraskapress.unl.edu/product/Commentators-Bible-Leviticus.675296.aspx>