

## ~PELICAN (87)

[Hebrew, *qa- 'ath'*]

- The translators of the **Greek Septuagint** and **Latin Vulgate** identified the **Hebrew** word *qa- 'ath'* with the **pelican**. It is listed among the birds designated as **unclean** in the Mosaic Law.
- And these are what you will loathe among the flying creatures. They should not be eaten. They are a loathsome thing, the eagle and the osprey and the black vulture. (**Leviticus 11:13**)
- And the swan and the **pelican** and the vulture. (**Leviticus 11:18**)
- Any clean bird you may eat. (**Deuteronomy 14:11**)
- But these are the ones of which you must not eat, the eagle and the osprey and the black vulture. (**Deuteronomy 14:12**)
- And the **pelican** and the vulture and the cormorant. (**Deuteronomy 14:17**)
- The **pelican** is one of the largest of the flying birds, attaining a length of over 1.5 meters (5 feet), with a majestic wingspread of 2.5 meters (8 feet) or more. The yellowish beak is long and hooked, and the large elastic pouch beneath is scarcely noticeable when empty.
- Ponderous on land, the pelicans are strong, graceful fliers and have been known to have their nesting places as much as 100 kilometers (60 miles) from the places of their fishing. They are superb fishers, and their webbed feet enable them to maneuver swiftly in the water.
- When the **pelican** is gorged with food, it often flies away to a lonely place, where it takes a melancholy posture, with its head sunk on its shoulders, so motionless that it might be mistaken from a distance for a white stone.
- The bird assumes this attitude for hours at a time, thus befitting the melancholy inactivity to which the psalmist refers when he illustrates the poignancy of his grief by writing,
- I do resemble the **pelican** of the wilderness. I have become like a

little owl of desolated places. (**Psalms 102:6**)

- Here **wilderness** does not necessarily connote a desert, but simply an area away from human habitations, perhaps a swamp. During certain seasons, swamps in the northern Jordan Valley are still the home of **pelicans**.
- Three varieties of **pelicans** are found in Israel. The most common is the eastern **white pelican**, *Pelecanus onocrotalus*, the **Dalmatian pelican**, *Pelecanus crispus*, and the **pink-backed pelican**, *Pelecanus rufescens*, are seen less often.
- The **pelican** shows a distinct preference for uncultivated places, where it will not be disturbed by man. There it nests and hatches its young and retires after fishing.
- Because of this fondness for lonely, desolate places, this bird is used in the Bible as a **symbol of utter desolation**. To symbolize Edom's coming desolation, Isaiah foretold that the **pelican** would take possession of that land.
- And the **pelican and the porcupine** must take possession of her, and **long-eared owls and ravens** themselves will reside in her, and he must stretch out over her the measuring line of emptiness and the stones of wasteness. (**Isaiah 34:11**)
- Zephaniah prophesied that **pelicans** would dwell among the pillar capitals of Nineveh, indicating total ruin and absence of humankind.
- And he will stretch out his hand toward the north, and he will destroy Assyria. And he will make Nineveh a desolate waste, a waterless region like the wilderness. (**Zephaniah 2:13**)
- And in the midst of her, droves will certainly lie stretched out, all the wild animals of a nation. Both **pelican** and porcupine will spend the night right among her pillar capitals. A voice will keep singing in the window. There will be devastation at the threshold, for he will certainly lay bare the very wainscoting. (**Zephaniah 2:14**)