

Deuteronomy 14:16

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

The little owl, and the great owl, and the swan,

Analysis

The little owl, and the great owl, and the swan—Three water and nocturnal birds: kos (קֹס, little owl), yanshuf (יַנְשׁוּף, great owl or ibis), tinshemeth (תִּנְשֵׁמֶת, swan or barn owl). Owls inhabited ruins (Isaiah 34:11, Zephaniah 2:14), symbolizing desolation and God's judgment. They thrived where humans perished.

The gospel reverses this: Christ entered our ruin (**He hath sent me to heal the brokenhearted, to preach deliverance to the captives**, Luke 4:18) and transforms desolation into habitation. Where owls roosted in Babylon's ruins (Isaiah 13:21), God promises Israel: **I will make the wilderness a pool of water** (Isaiah 41:18). The food laws pointed Israel away from death's dwelling toward life's source.

Historical Context

Owls were associated with Athena in Greek culture (wisdom) and with death omens in Roman culture. Israel's prohibition rejected both pagan wisdom traditions and superstitious fear, anchoring knowledge in covenant relationship with YHWH alone.

Related Passages

1 John 4:8 — God is love

John 15:13 — Greatest form of love

Study Questions

1. What 'ruins' in your life (broken relationships, past failures) has Christ entered to bring healing?
2. How does the world's 'wisdom' (secular philosophy, self-help) resemble the owl—impressive but associated with spiritual darkness?
3. Where do you see God transforming 'wilderness' (barren, dead areas) into 'pools of water' (life and fruitfulness)?

Interlinear Text

את	וְסִבְכָּה	את	וְרִנְשָׁה	וְרִנְשָׁה	וְרִנְשָׁה
H853	The little owl	H853	and the great owl	and the swan	
	H3563		H3244		H8580

From KJV Study • kjvstudy.org