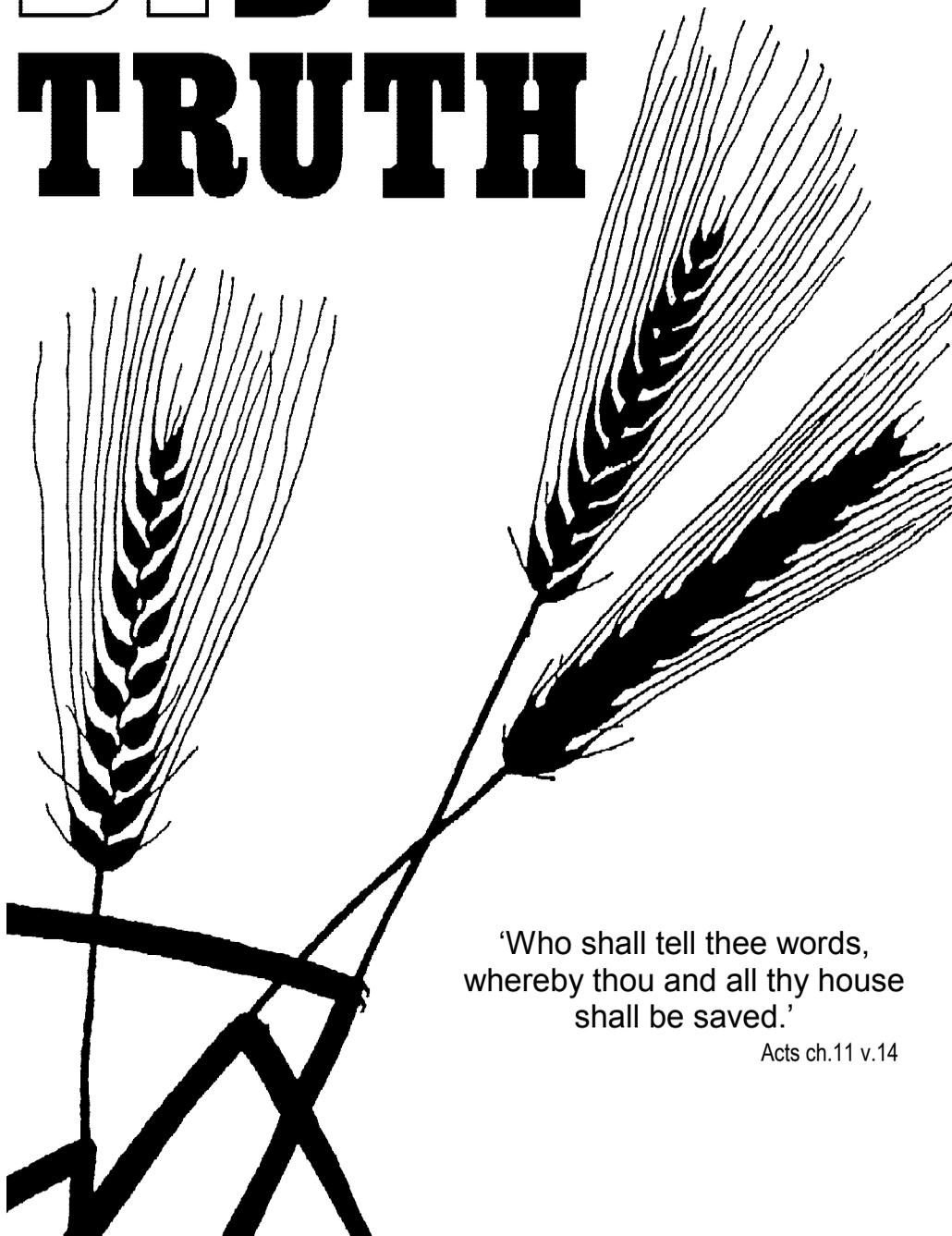


# BIBLE TRUTH

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'Who shall tell thee words,  
whereby thou and all thy house  
shall be saved.'

Acts ch.11 v.14

# The Biblical Background to Ancient Israel's Sea Migrations

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The Biblical land of Judea is largely comprised of dry mountains and desert, which make agriculture in the region difficult. Dr Zeev Herzog described the south Judean Beersheba Valley as,

‘extensive arable loess soils’ [with] ‘low annual precipitation, irregular periods of rain and high evaporation rates. These conditions resulted in long periods during which there was an absence of permanent settlements, with only pastoral nomads roaming through the region’.

*Beersheba Valley Architecture And Its Implications For The Biblical Record*, p.83

Although northern Israel has fertile green hills and valleys that are well suited for farming, the southern region that was home to the tribe of Judah soon turned to trade, including by sea, to provide for its residents. Newer research into the Old Testament Hebrew text provides support for a revised view of early life in Judah and its capital, Jerusalem.

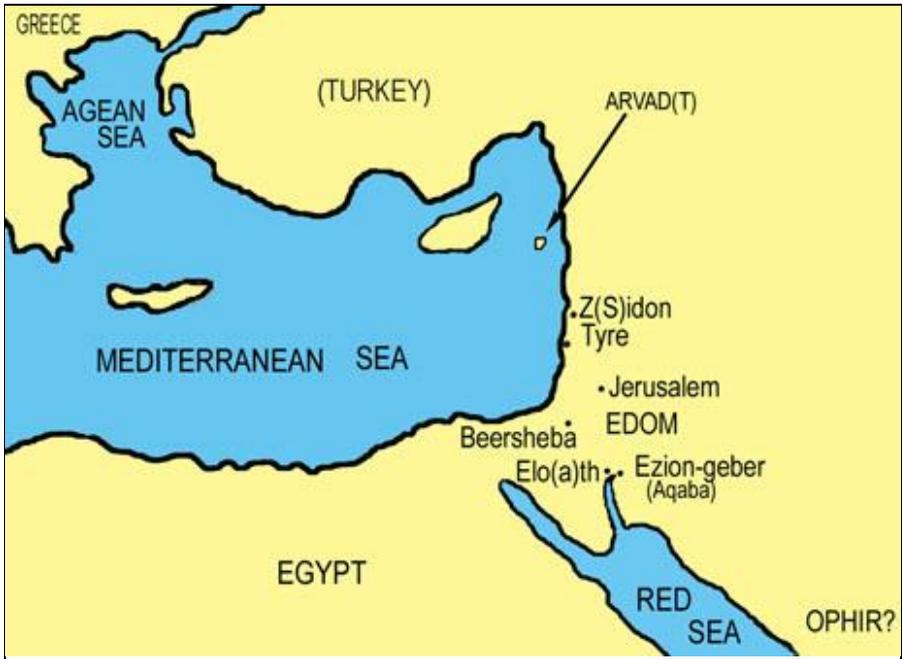
Professor Baruch A. Levine of Brandeis University tells us that in the time of David and Solomon,

‘Jerusalem was not a city of slaves, but of officials and guild groups — artisans, warriors, administrators, and cultic personnel (1 Chronicles ch.27 vv 25-33)’.

*Journal of Biblical Literature* 82:208

Very little is known about the inner workings of these professional guilds in Israel's early pre-exilic history, but scholars are beginning to piece together a better picture of their activities.

Dr Levine revealed the existence in ancient Israel of a guild of royal officers known in the Hebrew Scriptures as Net(h)inim (misconstrued as ‘temple slaves’ in the Authorized Version, 1 Chronicles ch.9 v.2). They were also called the ‘abde Selomo’, or officers of Solomon (1 Kings ch.9 v.27, 2 Chronicles chs 8 v.18 & 9 v.10). The King James Version translates this latter term as ‘servants’ of Solomon, because of a lack of understanding concerning what their service entailed.



We read about these ‘servants’ and their role in sailing expeditions in the first book of Kings.

‘And King Solomon made a navy of ships in Eziongeber, which is beside Eloth, on the shore of the Red sea, in the land of Edom. And Hiram sent in the navy his servants, shipmen that had knowledge of the sea, with the servants of Solomon. And they came to Ophir, and fetched from thence gold, four hundred and twenty talents, and brought it to king Solomon.’

1 Kings ch.9 vv 26-28

The Book of Second Chronicles also documents these seafaring activities.

‘Then went Solomon to Eziongeber, and to Eloth, at the sea side in the land of Edom. And Hiram sent him by the hands of his servants ships, and servants that had knowledge of the sea; and they went with the servants of Solomon to Ophir, and took thence four hundred and fifty talents of gold, and brought them to king Solomon.’

2 Chronicles ch.8 vv 17-18

After an analysis of the Hebrew text of Scripture, Dr Levine states that the 'Bene abde Selomo were members of a guild of royal merchants, founded in the days of Solomon, and the net(h)inim were members of a cultic guild' of sailors. In 1 Kings ch.9 v.27, Dr Levine describes them as 'merchants in service of Solomon. They embarked on a mercantile venture in co-operation with Phoenician "skippers"'. The Hebrew-Phoenician term for them was 'ansi oniyot', meaning 'men of ships' or 'professional sailors'.

These sailor-merchants are also mentioned in Ezekiel ch.27 vv 8-9 & 25-29, addressed to Tyre.

'The inhabitants of Zidon and Arvad were thy mariners: thy wise men, O Tyrus, that were in thee, were thy pilots. The ancients of Gebal and the wise men thereof were in thee thy calkers: all the ships of the sea with their mariners were in thee to occupy thy merchandise ... The ships of Tarshish did sing of thee in thy market: and thou wast replenished, and made very glorious in the midst of the seas. Thy rowers have brought thee into great waters: the east wind hath broken thee in the midst of the seas. Thy riches, and thy fairs, thy merchandise, thy mariners, and thy pilots, thy calkers, and the occupiers of thy merchandise, and all thy men of war, that are in thee, and in all thy company which is in the midst of thee, shall fall into the midst of the seas in the day of thy ruin. The suburbs shall shake at the sound of the cry of thy pilots. And all that handle the oar, the mariners, and all the pilots of the sea, shall come down from their ships, they shall stand upon the land.'

Tyre was a Phoenician small island-city, and the commercial trade in Israel must have been much more extensive. Of Solomon we read,

'For the king had at sea a navy of Tharshish with the navy of Hiram: once in three years came the navy of Tharshish, bringing gold, and silver, ivory, and apes, and peacocks. So King Solomon exceeded all the kings of the earth for riches and for wisdom'.

1 Kings ch.10 vv 22-23

As a result of this growing seafaring trade, Dr Julian Morganstern states that,

'Israel was transformed in large measure from the agricultural people, which it had been predominately from the time of its settlement in Palestine and continuing until well into the days of David, to a commercial people, carrying on steadily expanding

trading activities with the peoples of various foreign lands, some of them quite remote from Palestine’.

*Festival of Jeroboam I, Journal of Biblical Literature* 83. 113-114

This Israelite seafaring trade has been long known, but little discussed by historians. In the mid-nineteenth century, noted Hebrew-Christian scholar, Moses Margoliouth, wrote about it in his *History Of The Jews In Great Britain*, published in 1846. In this work, Dr Margoliouth asks,

‘Taking for granted that it is highly probable that the Jews visited Spain in the days of David and Solomon, in company with the Phoenician merchants; may we not extend the probability also to Britain?’

After quoting other scholars and Scripture, he states,

‘The expression “... the end of the world”, mentioned in Isaiah ch.62 v.11, is also supposed to mean Britain, which was a common appellation for this island in remote ages’.

Dr Margoliouth also pointed out that exiled Israel was to be prophetically found in the isles. Jeremiah ch.31 v.10 says,

‘Hear the word of the LORD, O ye nations, and declare it in the isles afar off, and say, He that scattered Israel will gather him, and keep him, as a shepherd doth his flock’.

Modern historians verify ancient Israel's seafaring. Professor Ephraim Stem wrote of ‘... the renewal in Josiah's time of commercial ties with Greece and the Aegean ...’ (*The Kingdom of Judah In Its Last Days*, p.407). Yet this commerce extended far beyond Greece.

This sea trade was so profitable and extensive that it brought an era of prosperity to Israel lasting years after the time of Solomon. Dr J. Maxwell Miller, of Birmingham-Southern College, adds,

‘Since Edom was in the hands of Judah at that time, the double alliance may have been designed to reopen the trade route from Aqabah through Judah and Israel to the Phoenician coast. In turn, the revival of trade may account for the prosperity which Israel and Judah enjoyed during the Omride period’.

*The Elisha Cycle, Journal of Biblical Literature* 85:454, n. 60

The Omride era refers to King Omri of Israel who reigned 882-871 BC, about a half-century after Solomon.

It is also little known that many lands, cities, islands and rivers have Hebrew-Phoenician roots. For example, the word 'Albion' is derived from the Hebrew-Phoenician 'Alpin', meaning a high mountain. This corner of Britain earned its name from the high rocks on the western coasts where the Hebrew-Phoenicians first landed. Similarly, the names 'Caledonia', 'Spain', 'Europe', 'Asia', 'Africa' and many more places have Hebrew-Phoenician word origins going back to their early settlements.

The golden age of Hebrew-Phoenician trade and commerce was not to last, as internal discord and external invasions combined to bring the nations of Israel, Judah, and Phoenicia to an end. Professor Susan Ackerman of Dartmouth College relates that between the second and third Babylonian invasions of 597 and 587 BC, 'Jerusalem was in a state of religious collapse' (*Harvard Theological Review* 82:3, p.267). Did some of its people take advantage of the extensive seafaring commerce and flee westward to avoid the coming final cataclysm in Judea?

Historian and author, Steven Collins, gives a wide body of evidence concerning ancient Israelites migrating westward through trade and colonization to European lands. His well-written book, *Israel's Lost Empires*. It is an interesting look at Israelite westward settlement beginning from the founding of Carthage and continuing on to other western lands.

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