

~TARSHISH 4 (305)

(Tar'shish) [from a root meaning, shatter]

.. Possibly Identified With Spain

.. Trade Relations With Solomon

.. In Prophecy

- A region initially populated by offspring of **Tarshish**, a son of Javan and grandson of Japheth. There are some indications of the direction in which the descendants of **Tarshish** migrated during the centuries following the Flood.
- The prophet Jonah, circa **844 B.C.E.**, commissioned by Yehowah to go to Nineveh in Assyria, tried to escape his assignment by going to the Mediterranean seaport of **Joppa**, **Tel Aviv-Yafo** and buying passage **on a ship going to Tarshish**.
- And the word of Yehowah began to occur to Jonah the son of Amittai, saying; (**Jonah 1:1**)
- Get up, go to Nineveh the great city, and proclaim against her that their badness has come up before me. (**Jonah 1:2**)
- And Jonah proceeded to get up and run away to **Tarshish** from before Yehowah, and he finally came down to Joppa and found a ship going to Tarshish. So he paid its fare and went down into it, in order to go with them to Tarshish from before Yehowah. (**Jonah 1:3**)
- Hence he prayed to Yehowah and said; Ah, now, O Yehowah, was not this an affair of mine, while I happened to be on my own ground? That is why I went ahead and ran away to **Tarshish**, for I knew that you are a God gracious and merciful, slow to anger and abundant in loving-kindness, and feeling regret over the calamity. (**Jonah 4:2**)
- Thus, **Tarshish** must obviously have been in or on the Mediterranean in the opposite direction from Nineveh, and evidently it was better reached by sea than by land. The heart of the open sea is mentioned in connection with **the ships of Tarshish**, at;
- The ships of **Tarshish** were your caravans for your articles of exchange, so that you get filled and become very glorious in the

heart of the open sea. (**Ezekiel 27:25**)

- Into vast waters those rowing you have brought you. The east wind itself has broken you in the heart of the open sea. (**Ezekiel 27:26**)
- With an east wind you wreck the ships of **Tarshish**. (**Psalms 48:7**)
- When you threw me to the depths, into the heart of the open sea, then a very river encircled me. All your breakers and your waves, over me they passed on. (**Jonah 2:3**)
- An inscription of Assyrian Emperor Esar-haddon of the **Seventh Century B.C.E**, boasts of his victories over Tyre and Egypt, and it claims that all the kings of the islands from Cyprus **as far as Tarsisi** paid him tribute. [**Ancient Near Eastern Texts**, edited by J. Pritchard, 1974, p. 290]
- Since Cyprus is in the eastern Mediterranean, this reference would also indicate a location in the western Mediterranean. Some scholars identify **Tarshish** with Sardinia, an island in the western Mediterranean.

•• **Possibly Identified With Spain**

- Most scholars associate **Tarshish with Spain**, based on ancient references to a place or region in Spain called Tartessus by Greek and Roman writers.
- While Greek geographer Strabo, of the **First Century B.C.E**, placed a city called **Tartessus** in the region around the Guadalquivir River in Andalusia [**Geography, 3, II, 11**], the name **Tartessus** appears to have applied generally to the southern part of the Iberian Peninsula.
- Many reference works give great emphasis to Phoenician colonization of the Spanish coastlands and refer to Tartessus as a Phoenician colony, but there appears to be no solid basis for such theory.
- Thus, the **Encyclopaedia Britannica [1959, Vol. 21, p. 114]** states: **Neither the Phoenicians nor the Carthaginians left any very permanent mark upon the land, while the Greeks influenced it profoundly.**
- Ships from Tyre and Sidon may have traded beyond the straits and in Cádiz at least as early as the **9th Century B.C**, yet modern

archaeology, which has located and excavated Greek, Iberian and Roman towns, has not laid bare a single Phoenician settlement or found more important Phoenician remains than the odds and ends of trinkets and jewels and similar articles of barter.

- The inference is clear that, except perhaps at Cádiz, the Phoenicians built no towns, but had mere trading posts and points of call.
- History also shows that when the Phoenicians and Greeks began trading with Spain the land was already populated and the native inhabitants brought forth the silver, iron, tin, and lead that the traders sought.
- There appears to be good reason for believing, then, that descendants of Javan, Ionians, through his son **Tarshish** eventually spread into and became prominent in the Iberian Peninsula. Such suggested location of **Tarshish** at least harmonizes satisfactorily with the other Biblical references.

•• Trade Relations With Solomon

- Phoenician trading with **Tarshish** is clearly borne out by the record of King Solomon's time, some 13 centuries after the Flood, when maritime commerce also began to be engaged in by the nation of Israel.
- Solomon had a fleet of ships in the Red Sea area, manned in part by experienced seamen provided by Phoenician King Hiram of Tyre, and trafficking especially with the gold-rich land of Ophir.
- And there was a fleet of ships that King Solomon made in Ezion-geber, which is by Eloth, upon the shore of the Red Sea in the land of Edom. (**1 Kings 9:26**)
- And Hiram kept sending in the fleet of ships his own servants, seamen, having a knowledge of the sea, along with the servants of Solomon. (**1 Kings 9:27**)
- And they proceeded to go to Ophir and take from there four hundred and twenty talents of gold and bring it in to King Solomon. (**1 Kings 9:28**)

- Reference is thereafter made to **a fleet of ships of Tarshish** that Solomon had on the sea along with Hiram's fleet of ships, and these ships are stated to have made voyages once every three years for the importation of gold, silver, ivory, apes, and peacocks.
- For the king had a fleet of ships of **Tarshish** on the sea along with Hiram's fleet of ships. Once every three years the fleet of ships of **Tarshish** would come carrying gold and silver, ivory, and apes and peacocks. (**1 Kings 10:22**)
- It is generally believed that the term, **ships of Tarshish**, in course of time came to stand for a **type** of ship, as one lexicon puts it: **large, sea-going vessels, fit to ply to Tarshish**. [A Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament, by Brown, Driver, and Briggs, 1980, p. 1077]
- In a similar way, the name Indiamen originally was derived from the name applied to large British ships engaged in trade with India and in time came to apply to ships of that type no matter what their origin or destination.
- Jehoshaphat, for his part, made **Tarshish** ships to go to Ophir for gold, but they did not go, because the ships were wrecked at Ezion-geber. (**1 Kings 22:48**)
- Shows that King Jehoshaphat, **936-911 B.C.E**, made **Tarshish** ships to go **to Ophir** for gold.
- The Chronicles account, however, states that Solomon's ships used for the triannual voyages were going to **Tarshish**.
- For ships belonging to the king were going to **Tarshish** with the servants of Hiram. Once every three years ships of **Tarshish** would come in, carrying gold and silver, ivory, and apes and peacocks. (**2 Chronicles 9:21**)
- Also that Jehoshaphat's ships were designed to go to **Tarshish** and, when wrecked, did not retain strength to go to **Tarshish**.
- So he made him a partner with himself in making ships to go to **Tarshish** and they made ships in Ezion-geber. (**2 Chronicles 20:36**)
- However, Eliezer the son of Dodavahu of Maresha spoke prophetically against Jehoshaphat, saying; Inasmuch as you have had partnership with Ahaziah, Yehowah will certainly break

down your works. Accordingly the ships were wrecked, and they did not retain strength to go to **Tarshish**. (**2 Chronicles 20:37**)

- This would indicate that Ophir was not the only port of call of the Israelite **ships of Tarshish**, but that they also navigated Mediterranean waters.
- This, of course, poses a problem, since the launching site of at least some of these vessels is shown to have been Ezion-geber on the Gulf of `Aqaba.
- And there was a fleet of ships that King Solomon made in Ezion-geber, which is by Eloth, upon the shore of the Red Sea in the land of Edom. (**1 Kings 9:26**)
- For the ships to reach the Mediterranean Sea, they would either have to traverse a canal from the Red Sea to the Nile River and then into the Mediterranean or else circumnavigate the continent of Africa.
- While it is by no means possible to determine now the details of navigational routes, including canals, available or employed in Solomon's and in Jehoshaphat's time, there is likewise no need to view the record of their maritime projects as unfeasible.

.. In Prophecy

- **Tarshish** appears to have been a major market for the merchant city of Tyre, perhaps her source of greatest riches during part of her history. From ancient times Spain has had mines working the rich deposits of silver, iron, tin, and other metals found there.
- Silver beaten into plates is what is brought in even from **Tarshish**, and gold from Uphaz, the workmanship of a craftsman and of the hands of a metalworker, their clothing is blue thread and wool dyed reddish purple. They are all the workmanship of skilled people. (**Jeremiah 10:9**)
- And you must say to Tyre, O you who are dwelling at the entrances of the sea, the tradeswoman of the peoples for many islands, this is what the Sovereign Lord Yehowah has said; O Tyre, you yourself have said; I am perfect in prettiness. (**Ezekiel 27:3**)
- **Tarshish** was your merchant because of the abundance of all

sorts of valuable things. For its silver, iron, tin and lead, your stores were given. ([Ezekiel 27:12](#))

- Thus Isaiah's prophetic pronouncement of Tyres overthrow depicts the ships of **Tarshish** as **howling** upon reaching Kittim, Cyprus, perhaps their last port of call on the eastern run, and receiving the news that the wealthy port of Tyre has been despoiled.
- The pronouncement of Tyre! Howl, you ships of **Tarshish**! For it has been despoiled from being a port, from being a place to enter in. From the land of Kittim it has been revealed to them. ([Isaiah 23:1](#))
- Cross over your land like the Nile River, O daughter of **Tarshish**. There is no shipyard any longer. ([Isaiah 23:10](#))
- Howl, you ships of **Tarshish**, for your stronghold has been despoiled. ([Isaiah 23:14](#))
- Other prophecies foretell God's sending some of his people to **Tarshish**, there to proclaim his glory.
- And I will set among them a sign, and I will send some of those who are escaped to the nations, to **Tarshish**, Pul, and Lud, those drawing the bow, Tubal and Javan, the faraway islands, who have not heard a report about me or seen my glory, and they will for certain tell about my glory among the nations. ([Isaiah 66:19](#))
- And of **ships of Tarshish** bringing Zions sons from far away.
- For in me the islands themselves will keep hoping, the ships of **Tarshish** also as at the first, in order to bring your sons from far away, their silver and their gold being with them, to the name of Yehowah your God and to the Holy One of Israel, for he will have beautified you. ([Isaiah 60:9](#))
- The kings of **Tarshish** and of the islands are to pay tribute to the one Yehowah designates as king.
- The kings of **Tarshish** and of the islands. Tribute they will pay. The kings of Sheba and of Seba. A gift they will present. ([Psalms 72:10](#))
- On the other hand, at;

- Sheba and Dedan and the merchants of **Tarshish** and all its maned young lions, they will say to you; Is it to get a big spoil that you are coming in? Is it to do much plundering that you have congregated your congregation, in order to carry off silver and gold, to take wealth and property, to get a very great spoil? (**Ezekiel 38:13**)
- The merchants of **Tarshish** are represented along with other trading peoples as expressing selfish interest in Gog of Magog's proposed plunder of Yehowah's regathered ones.
- As included among other things symbolizing self-exaltation, haughtiness, and loftiness, the ships of **Tarshish** are to be brought low, and only Yehowah is to be exalted in the day belonging to Yehowah of armies.
- The haughty eyes of earthling man must become low, and the loftiness of men must bow down, and Yehowah alone must be put on high in that day. (**Isaiah 2:11**)
- For it is the day belonging to Yehowah of armies. It is upon everyone self-exalted and lofty and upon everyone lifted up or low. (**Isaiah 2:12**)
- And upon all the cedars of Lebanon that are lofty and lifted up and upon all the massive trees of Bashan. (**Isaiah 2:13**)
- And upon all the lofty mountains and upon all the hills that are lifted up. (**Isaiah 2:14**)
- And upon every high tower and upon every fortified wall. (**Isaiah 2:15**)
- And upon all the ships of **Tarshish** and upon all desirable boats. (**Isaiah 2:16**)