

Your Letters

Where is Tarshish?

I would like, if I may, to respond to Brother Bernard's interesting comments on my article of the above title ([Mar. 2005, p. 88](#)).

Firstly, concerning the Hebrew word for "isles" in Genesis 10:5 (AV), in six more recent versions, from the RV (including the margin) to the NRSV, across the thirty-six uses of the word, translations vary within each version and across versions. 'Coastland' and 'island' are quite common.

Since an island is defined by its coast, it seems the Hebrew word could, depending on the context, refer to either, or both. It is probably both in Genesis 10, since it seems unlikely that the descendants of Javan (v. 4) only inhabited islands. Also, in later Scripture, Tarshish is clearly used of two places in opposite directions. So I suggest Genesis 10:5 is too vague to help in identifying Tarshish as Britain.

Secondly, with regard to "the merchants of Tarshish with all the *young lions* thereof", as with all exposition, context is important. There is nothing in Ezekiel 38 to indicate what the phrase "young lions" means in verse 13. In the wider context of the book it is used of sons of Josiah, "princes" who succeeded him on the throne of Judah (19:1-9), and later of a Pharaoh (32:2). So princes or young rulers would fit in with Ezekiel's usage, rather than colonies as adopted in relation to Britain.

Thirdly, since Brother Bernard understands Tarshish to be ancient Britain, the suggestion that "trade by Tarshish in Tyrian trade fairs was facilitated by Phoenician vessels" seems to undermine one of the principal ideas on which the identification of Britain with Tarshish is based. This is that ancient Britain was, and modern Britain is (though less so than formerly), a maritime trading power, each in its own right. The parallel breaks down if ancient Britons depended on the Phoenicians in order to trade abroad.

I know of no evidence that Britain in the time of Ezekiel was an independent maritime trading power but, on the basis of Ezekiel 27:12 (which gives no hint of a third party being involved) and

other verses, I believe Tarshish was; and, for that reason, was not ancient Britain.

Although I think it fits best, I would not be dogmatic about Carthage as Tarshish. Nor do I have a view at present as to the significance of Tarshish in latter-day prophecy. But the absence of an alternative does not mean that an unsatisfactory proposition has to be accepted. As with some other aspects of prophecy yet unfulfilled, we may have to wait and see.

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I thank Brother Fitzgerald for his letter. It is true that 'isle' is not always used in other versions. However, where the Hebrew word is associated with specific places whose location is known, these places are islands, for example Chittim, or Cyprus—"pass over the isles of Chittim, and see" (Jer. 2:10)—and Caphtor, or Crete "the remnant of the country [mg. isle] of Caphtor" (47:4).

With regard to "young lions", in Ezekiel 38 the context is not the internal affairs of one country but a list of countries (that is, Sheba, Dedan and Tarshish). In this context, in the absence of reference to princes, it would seem reasonable to assume that "young lions" refers to countries. But, even if it is accepted that "young lions" refers to princes, it could still be argued that this is a reference to rulers of other countries associated with Tarshish.

Finally, I do not think that the statements about Tarshish require that it built its own vessels, although this may have been the case. The phrase "ships of Tarshish" need not refer to ships made in Tarshish. For example, in 2 Chronicles 9:21 these ships appear to have been built by Solomon: "For the king's [Solomon's] ships went to Tarshish with the servants of Hiram: every three years came the ships of Tarshish bringing gold, and silver, ivory, and apes, and peacocks". They were called ships of Tarshish because they were associated with the trade route to Tarshish. Examples of the use of the name of a country to identify a particular type of vessel can be found in more recent times. Sailing ships which sailed to India from Britain were known as Indiamen although they were built in Britain. Open canoes are known as Canadian Canoes, but this does not mean they are necessarily built in Canada.—N.B.