

THE FIRST OPEN CHURCH, FOLLOWERS OF “THE WAY”

Part Eight, By: Jeffrey Crosby

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“Sing, O barren, thou that didst not bear; break forth into singing, and cry aloud, thou that didst not travail with child: for more are the children of the desolate than the children of the married wife, saith the Lord. Enlarge the place of thy tent, and let them stretch forth the curtains of thine habitations: spare not, lengthen thy cords, and strengthen thy stakes. For thou shalt break forth on the right hand and on the left; and thy seed shall inherit the [nations] ... No weapon that is formed against thee shall prosper; and every tongue that shall rise against thee in judgment thou shalt condemn. This is the heritage of the servant of the Lord, and their righteousness is of me, sayeth the Lord:” (Isaiah 54:1-3, 17,18).

And so it was that by Divine Providence that much of dispersed Israel ended up in the British Isles, as shown by the previous seven episodes of our story. As Joseph and his disciples arrived in Glastonbury, surrounded by Druid Bishops awaiting his arrival to bring the Word, we mentioned that King Arviragus (of the Silurian Kingdom), his brother King Guiderius, and a band of nobles were there to greet them. Quoting E. Raymond Capt, in *The Traditions of Glastonbury*, p. 41, states: “King Arviragus is recorded as having granted to Joseph and his followers ‘twelve hides’ of land (about 1900 acres), tax free, in ‘Yniswitrin’ ... afterwards called the ‘Isle of Avalon.’ Confirmation of this Royal Charter is found in the official Domesday Book of Britain (A.D. 1086) which states: “The Domus Dei, in the great monastery of Glastonbury, called the Secret of the Lord. The Glastonbury Church possesses, in its own villa, XII hides of land which have never paid tax” (Domesday Survey folio, p. 249 b.). It should be noted that in *The Drama of the Lost Disciples*, the author George Fusidale Jowett places the date of the Domesday Book as 1066, unlike Capt’s 1086, the former being a harmless error. But the grant recorded these apostles as “Judean refugees”, (in Old Latin ‘quidan advanae’ – ‘certain strangers’, in Late Latin ‘Culdich’, or Anglicized ‘Culdees’).

It should be noted, and obvious by its date of A.D. 1086, that this was not the original date of the Domesday Book’s composition. It is the date when the Norman King William had all prior British historical events checked and updated, entering them into the ancient record, at his initial reign as King of England.

Other confirmation of the land grant is found in William of Malmesbury's writings, the noted historian of Glastonbury, known for his accuracy. In A.D. 1126 he wrote an account of "the writings of the ancients", which he found in the Glastonbury Abbey (destroyed in A.D. 1184), which records: "In the year of our Lord, 36, twelve holy missionaries, with Joseph of Arimathea (who had buried the Lord) at their head, came over to Britain, preaching the Incarnation of Jesus Christ. The king of the country and his subjects refused to become proselytes to their teaching but in consideration that they had come a long journey, and being somewhat pleased with their soberness of life and unexceptional behaviour, the king, at their petition, gave them for their habitation a certain island bordering on his region, covered with trees and bramble bushes and surrounded by marshes, called Ynis-wytren."

This gracious reception and promise of protection, along with the land grant, continued through royal patronage. The apostle's influence grew until Arviragus' great grandson King Lucius established Christianity as the national religion of Britain, in the year A.D. 156. By that time the Levitical Druidic priesthood had been Christianized. This all occurred centuries before any Latin Church of Rome, which remained a foreign element in the Isles until its first introduction in A.D. 579 by the Latin monk Augustine.

The Domesday Book that was later written by king William's historians in the eleventh century, found its original source of information from the "Anglo-Saxon Chronicle", today in the British Museum. Parts, of the Chronicle overlap the period of the Domesday Book, being four manuscripts ending in the Year of our Lord 1001, 977, 1066, and 1079. The "Laud Manuscript" ends in A.D. 1154. So there is plenty of confirmation of this early arrival of Joseph of Arimathea, in A.D. 36, and the land grant bestowed upon these faithful missionaries.

As to the true Church of England and its roots, it is appropriately expressed by this response in *The Origin and Early History of Christianity in Britain*, by Andrew Gray, D.D., pp. 3-4: "[A] false notion, which prevails among Roman Catholics and Protestants alike – and among not a few of the less informed in [the Church of England's] communion also – is that the Church of England was formed or originated at the time of the English Reformation, in the reign of Henry VIII, about 1534, and that consequently her history extends back only to that date. These statements are so utterly unfounded, that 'to assert them is either a confession of gross ignorance or an admission of a deliberate attempt to deceive'."

The word "Reformation" furnishes a refutation. That only can be "reformed" which already exists. The Motto of the Reformers is a refutation: "Let the ancient customs prevail." The Magna Carta (A.D. 1215) proclaims "The Church of England shall be free [of Papal authority]."

Gray goes on to say, "We have no hesitation in saying that 'The Christian faith was professed in Britain even in the days of the Apostles, and when the Church of Rome herself was in the feebleness of her infancy [Paul was yet to be converted or arrive in Rome]. While the Pantheon was yet filled with the multitude of gods, and day by day there ascended the smoke of sacrifice to the Capitoline Jupiter – when Christianity at Rome was recognized only as a 'pernicious superstition,' the adherents to which were doomed to the fire and the stake – even then the name of Christ was

honoured on the banks of the Thames, and prayers went up to Him in the strange tongue of those on whom Cicero poured his contempt when he wrote Atticus, and who formed the subject of his jest with Trebatius, when he warned him against a horde of Celtic barbarians.’ This fact is fully proved by the testimony of ancient writers. (brackets mine)

“The very early history of the British Church has been involved in some obscurity by the destruction of many of the ancient records; and yet quite enough can be gathered from the history of those remote times to serve our purpose – probably quite as much as can be obtained in support of any contemporaneous event of secular history.”

All ancient chronicles and records, aside from the prejudiced opinion of the Romans against the Britons, show these people as quite self reliant, industrious and brilliant when the Gospel was first introduced to the Isles. The very early first century Roman historian Diodorus Siculus describes them as “civilized and courteous to strangers. They are of much sincerity and integrity, far from the craft and knavery of men among us [Romans], contented with plain and homely fare, and strangers to the excess and luxury of rich men.” Conybeare describes these people as rather ordinary in their handspun tartan clothing, with elaborate enamel and crafted jewelry, and that “[t]he chiefs were armed with helmets, shields and cuirasses of leather, bronze or chain mail, while their many weapons of defence – darts, pikes and broad swords – were often richly worked and ornamented” (quoting Conybeare, pp. 48-50, from *The Ensign Message*, Vol. 11 No. 4; Oct. - Dec. 2009). So here we have a fair description of not only the indigenous people to the area of Avalon during the first century, but also insight into character of these rulers.

We will get back to Arviragus and Guiderius in due time as this story progresses. But it should be noted that the oath King Arviragus gave to Joseph became known as ‘Defender of the Faith’, later affirmed by his grandson King Lucius, in A.D. 156, who renewed and enlarged the charter (and who was baptized as Christian before the year 156 at Winchester by St. Timotheus, his uncle). And it must be remembered that this was three centuries before Roman Catholicism existed. And even then, it was many centuries after Papal authority had spread its wings over the known world, with its universal teachings, that the royal lineage descendant of Arviragus, Queen Elizabeth, in A.D. 1570, would publicly declare the Reformation for the sovereign powers and the Church of England and denounce Papal authority out of Rome. Since that time, alluding to these ancient charters, she made it a royal decree for the sovereigns of England to take the oath, at the time of their coronation upon the ‘Stone of Destiny’ (called ‘Beth El’ in scripture), Biblical King David’s Throne. The present Queen Elizabeth II was the last to take this oath, in A.D. 1953, which proclaims only Jesus Christ as the Head of the Church. (The title of ‘Defender of the Faith’ was conferred on King Henry VIII and confirmed by Parliament in 1544).

Back to Joseph and the disciples when they disembarked on the shores of Avalon. It is said that Joseph, being weary from the journey from Gaul, stopped to rest while going up the grassy green knoll. He had a walking staff that he thrust into the soft moist soil. As the author Jowett says in his *Traditions of the Lost Disciples*, on p. 73:

“Tradition tells us that the staff became part of the earth, taking root, and in time blossomed. Historically it is known as the ‘Holy Thorn’. From ancient times it is referred to as a phenomenon of nature, being the only thorn tree in the world to bloom at Christmas time and in May. It endured throughout the centuries as a perpetual, living monument to the landing of Britain’s Sainly Disciples of Christ, and a ‘reminder of the birth of Jesus in far away Bethlehem’.” All of this is true, except for the fact that Jowett has made a grave mistake when it comes to the “birth of Jesus” being at Christmas time.

Biblical scholars place the birth of our Messiah on or around the first of October (by our modern Gregorian calendar). Jowett follows the deceptive teachings of the Roman Catholic Church (also referred to as the “Beast” in the books of Daniel and Revelation), which is common because “the great dragon was cast out [upon the earth], that old serpent, called the Devil, and Satan, which deceiveth the whole world: he was cast out into the earth....” (Rev. 12:9). In other words, Jowett has swallowed the lie of pagan Roman practice.

The Ensign Message states, on p. 30 of the Nov.-Dec. 2009 issue: “The staff planted by Joseph may have been our Lord’s staff, for Joseph as His nearest male relative [‘paranymphos’] had the disposal of our Lord’s belongings. It was certainly not Joseph’s staff, for by Israel law his staff must pass to his eldest son and was often made a death-bed ceremony. The thorn staff, like Aaron’s rod, budded and blossomed (Num. xvii. 8) and eventually grew into a beautiful tree becoming widely known as the ‘Sacred Thorn’.” This spot is also referred to as “Weary-all Hill”. *The Ensign Message* goes on to say, when speaking of King Arthur of British lore: “On Wirral Hill, the ancient cattle pasture of the Fortress of Sanctuary (City of Refuge) there lies a flat stone to mark the spot where Joseph thrust his staff into the ground”(p. 32)

Quoting Capt, in *The Traditions of Glastonbury*, pp. 85-88: “Perhaps the most dramatic of all the Traditions of Glastonbury is the legend of the Holy Thorn Tree. It is stated that when Joseph and the band of refugees first arrived on the Sacred Isle of Avalon, it was in December (some legends say it was on Christmas day). Joseph thrust his staff (some authorities have suggested it was the staff of Christ Himself) in the ground, perhaps to signify his journey was over. To this day, the spot bears the name it received in Joseph’s time - “Wyrall” or “Weary-all-Hill.”

“Shortly, the staff, in the moist ground, took root, budded and blossomed and eventually grew into the famous “Glastonbury Thorn.” The Thorn has endured through the centuries as a phenomenon of nature. It is the only thorn in the world to bloom in December (around Christmas time) and again in the month of May. Modern botanists agree that the Glastonbury Thorn is a unique Levantine hawthorn (*Crataegus Monogyna Praecox*), a native of countries bordering on the eastern Mediterranean Sea. Its leaves become thick and leathery, which is typical of many plants native to semi-desert regions. The tree tends to hold its leaves throughout the entire winter.

“Some writers state the blooming of the Thorn Tree around Christmas time is in honor of Christ’s birthday. However, one thing is certain, December 25th was not the birthday of Jesus. The latest Chronology gives September 29, 2 B.C. as the birthday of Jesus. The birthday of Jesus would never ha[ve] been celebrated by Joseph of

Arimathea and it was never observed by the early Christian Church. Eventually, this pagan holiday (Christmas Day) was incorporated into the Christian calendar with Christian overtones.

“The Glastonbury Holy Thorn Tree is unique because it has no exact parallel among the native English trees, in its propensity to bloom twice each year. Noteworthy to the reader is that the natural blooming period of the Levantine (Palestine) thorn is during the month of December while the native thorn of Britain blossoms only in the month of May. The earliest documentation of the Holy Thorn Tree, coming into blossom at Christmas time, is given in the “life of Joseph of Arimathea,” printed in A.D. 1520, by Richard Pynson. Thus, for over 400 years, the Holy Thorn Tree is known to have preserved its peculiar feature of flowering twice each year.

“A local ballad says: ‘The staff het budded and het grew, An at Churnas bloomed the whoe day droo; An still het blooms Churnas bright, But best that zay at dark midnight.’

“During the ascendancy of the fanatical element among the Puritans, the Holy Thorn Tree was cut down. Its executioners justified the vandalism by declaring that the Thorn Tree had become an object of idolatry. It is said the fanatic who wielded the axe was Wounded by a thorn in the eye, losing its sight, for his efforts. It should be noted that the Puritans were men who were deeply in earnest about religion. Most of them quite genuinely believed that by removing images, and other objects of veneration, they were bringing the people nearer to God. In their misguided zeal many churches were despoiled; glass windows were smashed, carvings disfigured and frescoed paintings on walls were covered with thick coatings of whitewash.

“At the time of its destruction, the original Thorn was a gigantic tree for its species, and was in two main trunks. One was completely demolished and the other badly damaged, nearly cut through. It survived, in this condition, for about another thirty years. During this time numerous cuttings were taken from it. The trees grown from these cuttings continued the characteristics of the original, in that they blossom twice, around Christmas and again in May. This phenomenon is noted only in those trees budded or grafted from the original, or from a budded descendant.

“Bishop Godfrey Goodman of Gloucester (A.D. 1583-1656) visited Glastonbury and observed the revived Holy Thorn Tree. He wrote: ‘The White Thorn of Glastonbury which usually blossoms on Christmas day was cut down, yet I did not heare that the party was punished ... Certainly, the thorne was very extraordinary; for at my being there I did consider the place, how it was sheltered; I did consider the soile, and all othe[r] circumstances, and yet I could find no natural cause.’

“About the end of the eighteenth century, a certain Jonathan Clarke had a stone marker carved and placed to mark the site of the original Holy Thorne Tree. It carries the inscription, “J.A., A.D. XXXI.” The date of A.D. 31 is wrong as it was several years later before Joseph of Arimathea brought his little band of followers to Avalon.

“In olden days, a spray of Glastonbury’s flowering Holy Thorn Tree was always taken and presented to the King (or Queen) of England. The custom fell into disuse for a time but was reinstated by His majesty King George V (A.D. 1865-1936). The present Queen Elizabeth II is now the recipient of this age-old custom. This legend of the Holy

Thorn Tree was held in such strong faith that in olden days sailors carried pieces of it for protection. Men died in peace if they were assured that a spray would be buried with them.

“Slips from the Holy Thorn Tree have been sent to many countries. In October 1901, six cuttings from the Glastonbury Abbey Thorn Tree were sent to the Rt. Rev. Henry Yates Saterlee, the first Bishop of Washington D.C., U.S.A. Two trees are known to have been grown from these cuttings. One is an enormous tree that can be seen on the close of Washington National Cathedral, where it grows in its own plot of ground in front of St. Albans School for boys. The other is growing in the Brooklyn Botanic Gardens: One famous descendant of the Holy Thorn Tree is in the courtyard of the home of Mary Queen of Scots, in St. Andrews, Scotland.”

Again, it should be noted that the date that Capt cites as the “latest Chronology” of the birth date of Christ Yahshua as being September 29th, 2 B.C. is arguable. In Ernest L. Martin’s comprehensive work *The Birth Of Christ Recalculated*, taking into account extensive Biblical and Roman history plus a computer readout of all of the moon’s ancient phases concluded (in conjunction with Rev. 12:1-5), that the moon is under the constellation Virgo’ feet one night each year, and the birth most likely happened September 11th, 3 B.C. But that is beyond the scope of our story.

There is a poem written by Kirsten Parsons entitled *The Little Thorntree*, which goes like this: “The little Thorntree cried and cried, When men’s hands stripped it bare, They made a rough and cruel crown, To put on Jesus’ hair. He cried upon the rugged cross, From sin to set us free, The little Thorntree cried with shame, That day on Calvary. Then Joseph laid His body down, The scripture to obey, And from the Thorn he chose a branch, To carry far away. To Glastonbury’s hilly land, upon its sacred mound, He took the little Thorntree twig, And put it in the ground. It grew into a stately tree, the pilgrims loved the sight, To glory our dear Saviour’s name, It blooms each Christmas night.”

It is uncanny how a simple thorn twig could be an ensign to the only True Messiah of His people in history. Not some pantheon of gods or goddesses, some professor of great philosophies or worldly wisdoms, or some unknown entity who is too far beyond reach in his charitable benevolence for those who he sees fit to accept through some alleged prophet. No! This is simply a small sign of Yahweh, when He came in the flesh as Yahshua Messiah, how He said through His prophet Jeremiah 600 years before the fact: “See, I have this day set thee over the nations and over kingdoms, to root out, and to pull down, and to destroy, and to throw down, to build and to plant” (Jer. 1:10). Even after death, Christ lived among His own people, and the world changed for Yahweh’s purpose.