

THE CHRISTIAN PROPHETIC WITNESS ESSAY COMPETITION 2016

Here is the winning essay in the group for 15-18 years old:

“How and when did the Gospel come to the British Isles?”

It is often stated that the Gospel was introduced into Britain by St. Augustine from Rome in AD 597. However, records state that a Christian Church already in Britain resisted Augustine right from the start. It is clear that there is more to be considered than at first appears.

An overview of ancient British culture as a whole will aid a better understanding of events. It can be shown that the British people are of the twelve tribes of Israel. Contrary to popular opinion, they were not savages, but lived in the world's most civilized country. London was a thriving city before Rome was even founded. British universities educated up to 60,000 students, with graduation taking twenty years of learning and involving mastery of many subjects. Britain was densely populated, had a just legal system, and has always been fiercely independent. It was noted for its tin, and even supplied this for Solomon's temple.

Britain was exceptionally well-prepared for the coming of the Gospel. Druidism was its religion, and its beliefs were identical to those of the patriarchs. It is often accused of being pagan, but no evidence of un-Godly sacrifices, nor any idol, has ever been discovered in Britain. The population was extremely zealous, and was renowned as far as India for its devotion. Druidism was the predominant influence upon British culture, and its doctrines were very similar to those of Christianity. Druidism's three foundations were peace, love, and justice, and the Druidic motto was “The Truth Against the World.” The Druids believed in man's sinfulness, the resurrection, and eternal life. One of the Druidic Trinity was called “Yesu,” pronounced the same as Jesus in the ancient British language. A Druidic rendition of *Psalm 24:10* proclaims His identity: “Who is the King of Glory? The Lord Yesu; He is the King of Glory.” Druidism looked towards the coming of Christ, making it the perfect preparation for the coming of Christianity.

There are especially interesting traditions claiming that Jesus Himself came to Britain. These beliefs are very strong and imply two separate visits. The first is said to have been with His mother Mary and her uncle, Joseph of Arimathea, who was involved in the tin trade. There are traditions of this visit in Cornwall, Devon, Somerset, Wiltshire, South Wales, and the Hebrides. Jesus is also said to have returned prior to the beginning of His Ministry, and to have lived in the Glastonbury area in Somerset. Although these traditions are very strong, they should not be taken as fact. The Bible suggests Jesus' absence from Palestine between the ages of 12 and 30, but does not say anything about His whereabouts. While it is only a possibility, it would surely have been a most wonderful and fitting thing.

There are references in the Scriptures about the Gospel coming to Britain. Isaiah uses the phrases “the ends of the earth” and “the isles afar off” to refer to the British Isles, and states in *Isaiah 42* that God would send the Gospel there. In *Matthew 15:24*, Jesus declares that He was sent “unto the lost sheep of the house of Israel,” meaning the “lost” ten tribes, who came to Western Europe, including Britain. Jesus commanded His disciples to preach to these people in *Matthew 10:5-7*. Just prior to His Ascension, He told the apostles that they would be witnesses for Him “unto the uttermost part of the earth,” meaning Britain (*Acts 1:8*). The Bible could not be clearer about the Gospel coming to Britain.

The Gospel arrived in the British Isles soon after the Crucifixion. Joseph of Arimathea, the man who buried Christ in his own tomb, fled from Palestine to France around AD 37 along the route he would have been familiar with through the tin trade. His companions included his family, Martha, the three Marys, Lazarus, and possibly Mary the mother of Jesus. A delegation of Druids met them in France and invited them to Britain to give news of the fulfilled prophecy of the death of Christ. They journeyed to Glastonbury, where they were met by Arviragus, King of Siluria (an ancient British province). He, several family members, and many of the Druids, became the Gospel's first converts in Britain. He gifted Joseph and his companions some land on which they built a wattle church to the exact dimensions of the tabernacle. This church was the first in the world to be built above ground. Most of Joseph's companions soon returned to the continent to preach the Gospel there. He was very active at Glastonbury and the apostle Philip sent him 160 helpers from France. Many missionaries trained at Glastonbury were sent out all over the country to spread The Word, and, in just a few years, churches were established in every corner of Britain. Joseph continued to preach the Gospel in Britain until his death in AD 82.

The times during which the Gospel was spreading through Britain were very unstable. In AD 43, the Roman Empire invaded Britain at the command of Emperor Claudius. The object of this invasion was to eradicate Christianity and Druidism from Britain. The main leader of the British forces, which were the world's best, was Caradoc, better known as Caractacus, cousin of Arviragus. He directed the war until AD 52, when he was betrayed by a relative and transported with his family to Rome. Arviragus took over the leadership after him. It was one of the bloodiest wars ever fought, with many terrible battles in which thousands died. The fighting continued until AD 118, when Britain was absorbed into Rome by treaty. Although it may have seemed devastating at the time, God had a purpose for the Silurian royal family in Rome. Caractacus was tried before the senate, and, astonishingly, was granted his life. He was sentenced to seven years free custody in Rome, on condition that he swore never to bear arms again against Rome. The rest of his family was free to go. The Romans gave him a palace in which he was converted by the apostle Paul. The palace hosted a Christian Church, in which Caractacus' son Linus became a prominent leader. Claudia, Caractacus' daughter, and her husband, Rufus Pudens, a Roman who had fought in Britain and was also Paul's half-brother, inherited the palace and remained there with the Church. They are mentioned in II *Timothy* 4:21. In this way, God turned a seeming disaster into good. Others arrived soon after Joseph of Arimathea to help spread the Gospel. The apostle Simon Zelotes made two separate visits to Britain, first arriving in AD 44. He visited Joseph at Glastonbury on both occasions. He preached not only to the British, but also to the Romans, who crucified him in Lincolnshire in AD 61.

Arriving in Britain shortly after Simon Zelotes was Aristobulus, father-in-law of Peter and brother of Barnabas. Paul sent him to Britain from Rome, and his absence is hinted at in *Romans* 16:10. Aristobulus worked hard in expanding the Church, especially in Wales. It is often said that he was martyred by the British in AD 59, but he was actually killed because of his connections with Rome.

The apostle Paul made at least two visits to Britain between his Roman imprisonments. He lived mainly in Wales, but preached all over the country. One of the sites where he preached is today marked by St. Paul's Cathedral. He visited Joseph at Glastonbury, and there are traditions of his visit as far north as the Clyde. The evidence regarding this visit is extremely

strong, and many facts in history are based upon less. The Druidic triads preserve some of what he taught in Britain as “the Triads of Paul the Apostle,” which are pure Biblical truths.

Many others were involved in spreading the Gospel in Britain. There is a strong tradition that the three wise men came to Sutherland. There are evidences that Peter spent a lengthy time at Glastonbury, along with Barnabas, and also visited Whithorn in Wigtownshire. There is very strong support for Andrew’s residence in Scotland. Traditions can also be found of the visits of James the Great, John, Luke, and Philip. Detailed study reveals that all of the apostles either preached in Britain or to people whose descendants came to Britain. Again, it is very clear that the Lord had a great plan for the Gospel in Britain.

Those who first brought Christianity to Britain were known as “servants of the Lord.” The Gospel reached Ireland around AD 48. Churches soon became established in every part of Britain. Brechin in Scotland became a prominent missionary centre. The Gospel was never opposed in Britain, and the transition from Druidism to Christianity was completely peaceful. Indeed, Christianity did not replace Druidism, but Druidism changed into Christianity. Druidism did not completely cease until around AD 1000.

The British Church was still expanding in AD 167, when King Lucius, Caractacus’ great-grandson, called the national assembly at Winchester. It was here that Christianity officially replaced Druidism as the national religion, and Britain became the first country to declare itself Christian. This decision would have been unanimous from all parts of the nation, and is proof that Christianity spread unopposed. There can be no greater testimony than this of what God had done.

Christianity still flourished in Britain at the time of the Diocletian persecution, which reached Britain in AD 300. Even though it was driven back to the continent within two years, over 10,000 perished, confirmation that Britain possessed many fervent believers.

Inevitably, there was some falling away over the years, but there were times of great revival. St. Patrick evangelized the whole of Ireland during the fifth century, and also spent much time at Glastonbury. St. Ninian preached in southern Scotland and northern England. St. Columba sent preachers all over Scotland from Iona during the sixth century. There are too many other prominent individuals to mention here, as God always raised up great men when revival was necessary.

Thus, when Augustine brought Roman Catholicism to Britain in AD 597, he found there a Church to resist him. A number of talks were held with him, in which the British refused to accept any claim to superiority by the pope or the Roman Church. Augustine then turned to the Saxons, and appeared to have great success, baptizing over 10,000 men in one day and converting the whole of Kent and part of Essex. These “converts,” however, lacked sincerity, and quickly became lapsed. In AD 613, the Roman Church showed its true colours when Augustine’s successor caused 1,200 British Christians to be massacred. Britain opposed Romanism more than any other country.

To briefly summarize, Joseph of Arimathea brought the Gospel to the British Isles in AD 37, founded a mission at Glastonbury, and built the first church in the world above ground. The British royalty accepted the Gospel from the beginning, and fought against Rome in its defence. The Silurian royal family contributed the first members of the Christian Church at Rome. Christianity spread rapidly in Britain, fuelled by missionaries and visits from the

apostles. At the time of the Roman invasion, most of the population was Christian. Britain was the first country to make Christianity its national religion. During its first four centuries, no heresies were found in the British Church. Periods of glorious revival were experienced until the time of Augustine, and faithful Christians remained right up until the Protestant Reformation.

With such a glorious history, there can be no doubt that God had a great purpose for the Gospel coming to Britain. Perhaps the fact that shows best the scale of Christianity in Britain is that virtually the whole of Europe first had the Gospel brought to it by British missionaries. God gifted His Salvation to the British, and in response they spread it as far as they could. Over a millennium later, in the days of the British Empire, they were to bring the Gospel to every corner of the world. According to His Will, everything worked out to the glory and honour of Christ.

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