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## STONEHENGE, DRUIDS AND JESUS

Dennis Price, *The Missing Years of Jesus: The Greatest Story Never Told*  
(London: Hay House, 2009), 274 pp. ISBN 978-1-84850-033-4

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Of all places to hear a book announcement, I was standing in the midst of the great trilithons at Stonehenge. Near the conclusion of the vernal equinox ritual in 2009 participants were invited to contribute by expressing themselves. Some mourned those that had passed to the next life. Another had a poem, which I ended up hearing three times during ritual observations at Stonehenge and Avebury Henge. However, one contribution stood out. Frank Somers of Stonehenge Druids came into the center of the circle to announce a new book written by an archaeologist and expert on Stonehenge, Dennis Price. The book was *The Missing Years of Jesus* and Somers spoke nothing but praise for it as it proposed that Jesus had spent time at Stonehenge between the ages of 12 and 30. The very thought of Druids somehow influencing Jesus's teaching made sense to the people standing around the stones.

Dennis Price studied Greek, Latin and ancient history and is a former archaeologist with Wessex Archaeology. While admittedly a noted expert on Stonehenge, he was the last archaeologist to see the inside of Britain's famous pyramid at Silbury. In the book Price combines his knowledge of ancient prehistoric sites of Great Britain, in particular Stonehenge, with the legend that Jesus Christ joined his alleged uncle Joseph of Arimathea on a trip to the British Islands during his missing years from the gospel narratives between the ages of 12 to 30. Price examines the folklore of the West Country of Great Britain regarding the advent of Jesus in Great Britain as well as the archaeological record to suggest that in fact the circumstantial evidence points to the presence of Jesus in Great Britain during these missing

years. In sixteen chapters, he weaves the legend of Jesus' arrival in Britain with West Country folklore, ancient Druids, Stonehenge and the gospel record. With notable creativity, he occasionally exegetes the biblical narrative of Jesus' life with frequent eisegetical commentary to fit the folklore. The provenance of the folklore is disappointingly absent from the book and contributes to a noticeable weakness in Price's thesis.

The treatment of Jesus' missing years is not something new. There have been several propositions in the past that have suggested Jesus' presence in Tibet and India as well as other places under the tutelage of religious leaders of the various people that he encountered thus giving an answer to the similarities between Christianity and those other religions. In 1894 Nicolas Notovich wrote *The Unknown Life of Christ* and argued that Jesus visited India and Tibet. *The Aquarian Gospel of Jesus the Christ of the Piscean Age* written in 1908 by Levi Dowling puts Jesus in India, Tibet and Persia. Edgar Cayce, in the early 1900s, popularized the notion of Jesus having multiple reincarnations and traveled in his youth to study Eastern religions. More recently, Gordon Strachan's *Jesus the Master Builder: Druid Mysteries and the Dawn of Christianity* argued that Jesus was knowledgeable in Pythagorean mathematics and utilized such knowledge in the construction of the church in Glastonbury, England. In addition there have been many claims to Jesus' post-resurrection appearances. Of particular mention, in Latter-day Saints Christology, he appeared in the Americas.

Jesus' appearance in Great Britain has a long and rich history dating back to Augustine of Canterbury and his statement that Jesus built the church in Glastonbury. In a letter written in 597 to Pope Gregory, Augustine noted,

In the Western confines of Britain there is a certain royal island of large extent, surrounded by water, abounding in all the beauties of nature and necessities of life. In it the first neophytes of Catholic Law, God beforehand acquainting them, found a church constructed by no human art, but divinely constructed by the hands of Christ Himself, for the salvation of His people. The Almighty has made it manifest by many miracles and mysterious visitations that He continues to watch over it as sacred to Himself, and to Mary, the Mother of God.

The notion of Jesus' arrival in Great Britain was popularized in that country by the poet William Blake. In 1805 he wrote *And Did Those Feet in Ancient Time* as a preference to his epic poem *Milton* and later Herbert Perry set it to music. Price calls *Jerusalem* Britain's most popular patriotic song. The first verse reads, "And did those feet in ancient time walk upon England's Mountain Green and was the holy Lamb of God on England's pleasant pastures seen in to the countenance Divine shine forth upon the clouded hills and was church then build it



there here among these dark satanic mills.ö Price asserts that Blake intuitively knew of Jesus presence in England and equates the ödark satanic millsö with an understanding of Stonehenge as having become a place of evil inhabited by a demonic being.

Still the notion of Jesusø presence in Great Britain is also seen in folktales which Price addresses throughout his book. He argues that, öthere were so many alluring aspects to Britain that itø hard to see how Jesus could have avoided visiting the placeö (p. 210). While there are perhaps some legitimate reasons for a tie of folk tales to the suggestion that Jesus actually arrived in Britain, Price poorly documents the origins of these tales but this is not an academic treatment; rather a popular one that will appeal to a popular audience. The strength of the book, however, is not in the academic content as much as it is in Priceø profound knowledge of ancient religious sites of Great Britain. He masterfully weaves the story of Jesusø missing years to these ancient sites by relying upon a sometimes unique if not eclectic understanding of various gospel passages addressing the life of Jesus himself.

#### Price and Jesus

I will restrict my remaining comments to two areas: Priceø view of Jesus and the influence of Druids on Jesusø theology. While Price makes some important observations regarding Jesusø early life, such observations do not necessarily merit the assumption that he traveled to Britain. For example, the absence of gospel references to Jesusø missing years does not correlate to his absence from Judea. Granted, it is plausible that Jesus traveled outside the Palestine of his day as he had with his family in Egypt, a distance of at least 300 km depending on the point of departure and return. The lack of recognition by his countrymen and relatives is a compelling and plausible argument for his absence from the area as Price suggests.

Price contends that Jesusø abilities to perform miracles grew after visiting England, öhe acquired his various skills and abilities as a result of trial, practice and observationö (p. 125). Furthermore, Price views Jesus as a öMessiah in waitingö who learned öpeaceful skillsö from the Dubunni in the West Country. He assumes that references found on Dubunni coins to an öEisuö are of Jesus. Price views Jesus as one who öpreached a message of peace . . . possessed the bearing of a king, nerves of steel and incredible braveryö (p. 185). He acknowledges that Jesus is

the most famous human being ever to have lived and his influence simply cannot be overstated (p. 205).

Price certainly regards the biblical narratives of Jesus's life contained in the gospels as an important source for understanding the missing years. Nevertheless, his Christology is something foreign to the biblical record. In essence, he makes Jesus too human while ignoring his eternally divine attributes. It has become popular in recent years to interpret Jesus from one's own personal experiences without regard to the historical or biblical record. Jesus is a great Rabbi to Jews, a prophet to Muslims, one among a pantheon of gods to Hindus, and a source of spirituality to Western esotericism, etc. When Christians assert his uniqueness as God-incarnate it is often disregarded as simply one of many interpretations of Jesus. However, since he is the foundation to a system of beliefs held by a third of the world's population, Christianity holds the right to interpret Jesus just as Muslims interpret Muhammad, Hindus Krishna and Buddhists Buddha.

Jesus, himself, identifies with God by his own affirmations. Most notable were his claims to have descended from heaven and to pre-exist (John 3:13; 8:58). Jesus does not leave to question his oneness with the father (John 10:30), power to forgive sins (Mark 2:8-10) and judge the world (Matt 25:31), lordship of the Sabbath (Mark 2:27-28). His disciples also asserted his identity as Lord and God (John 20:28, Titus 2:13; 1 Pet 1:1). In addition, the early church record testifies to the belief in Jesus's eternality. For example, Ignatius of Antioch (ca. 107) wrote, "He, being begotten by the Father before the beginning of time, was God the Word, the only-begotten Son and remains the same for ever." Similarly, Tertullian (ca. 197) wrote, "Tiberius accordingly, in whose days the Christian name made its entry into the world, having himself received intelligence from Palestine of events which had clearly shown the truth of Christ's divinity, brought the matter before the senate, with his own decision in favour of Christ." The clear indication of both the biblical and historical record is that Jesus is as the Nicene Creed stated, "the essence of the Father, God of God, Light of Light, very God of very God, begotten, not made, being of one substance with the Father; by whom all things were made [both in heaven and on earth]."

#### Stonehenge, Druids and Jesus

Stonehenge has long been associated with Druids. Dating from the antiquarians John Aubrey and William Stukeley, Druids were credited with having constructed the ancient stone temple. Many correctly dismiss such assertions and view Stonehenge as predating the traditional view that the Druids did not come to prominence in Great Britain until 500 BC. Price disagrees and asserts that there is no reason to suggest that the Druids, or at least a proto-Druid, did not perform rituals at



Stonehenge. He relates an early testimony of a Greek traveler named Pytheas as a reference to Stonehenge and Druids even though Pytheas only makes a vague reference to a famous round temple and the priests who were attendants of Apollo. This ancient (ca. 325 BC) reference might in fact be what is today called Stonehenge and the attendants could also be Druids; however, the lack of documentary evidence for the existence of the priestly caste draws a view that the Druids were not a prominent aspect of ancient Celtic religious life. Whatever the case and whoever worshiped at the ancient round temple, Pytheas' account suggests that the focus was on a sky-god figure who was renowned for prophecy and healing in what seemed to be a monolatristic form of worship rather than polytheistic.

Price asserts that there is even a New Testament reference to Stonehenge in the words of Jesus, "like unto whited sepulchers, which indeed appear beautiful outward, but are within full of dead [men's] bones, and of all uncleanness" (p. 193 quoting Matt 23:27). While there have been ancient visitors to Stonehenge from as far as the Alps, Price contends that, "It has taken no great leap of faith to envisage Jesus at Stonehenge" (p. 141). Perhaps, especially if the worshippers of Stonehenge were monolatrists who venerated a high god of prophecy and healing, who believed their origin was from a single god as the ancient Druids believed and who practiced sacrifice to appease this god. One would think that Jesus would be interested in a famous religious site of renown. Price makes the assumption that Jesus spent the years of his early adulthood in preparation for his ministry. Naturally, as suggested by Price, since Jesus was in Britain he would have been influenced by the Druids.

It is, for one, altogether unlikely that Jesus would have been theologically influenced by another religious faith. While he certainly dialogued with others about beliefs (Luke 2:46), it was he who proclaimed good news to the poor, liberty to the captives, recovery of sight to the blind and freedom for the oppressed (Luke 4:18). Relatively little is known of ancient Druid belief and it seems highly unlikely that their religious teachings would have persuaded Jesus in a theological manner. What is known of the ancient Druids can be easily contained in a few written pages. When compared to the expanse of Jewish literature of Jesus' day one must ask what would Jesus have learned from Druids that he did not already know from his own religious heritage. The greater question, it seems to me, would be what would the Druids have learned from Jesus. Just as he amazed those religious leaders at the

temple when he was twelve (Luke 2:47) and continued to amaze people in his adulthood (Luke 4:15), I assume Druids would have been similarly amazed. I would suggest that they could relate to the teachings of Jesus. They would have learned at least the following: 1. human sacrifice was insufficient to appease God; 2. they were in fact descended from one God who was the creator and sustainer of the universe; 3. this God is a revealer of the future and a healer of the sick.

### Conclusion

Folklore and myths are powerful purveyors of national identity. Take for example the folklore surrounding the arrival of the Pilgrims at Plymouth Rock. Following a harsh journey on the Mayflower and the struggle for survival after arriving in the new world the Pilgrims were greeted and helped by the Indians. Such a relationship culminated in the famous Thanksgiving scene of Indians and Pilgrims eating together after giving thanks to God for his provisions. This folklore is propagated every November in the United States without question of its origin or veracity.

Early written testimony, particularly that of William Bradford, never mentions such a scene around the table. Certainly, the Wampanoag Indians helped the Puritans during their first winter, but nothing is mentioned in regards to a collective prayer of thanksgiving to God. In fact, after the harvest of 1621 a three-day feast was held where the early European settlers demonstrated their military firepower to the indigenous people. The first reference to a collective prayer of thanksgiving was subsequent to the war with the Pequot in 1637. After the slaughter of 700 Pequot at Fort Mystic an official Day of Thanksgiving was declared by the governor of Massachusetts Bay Colony in gratitude that the Indians were given into the hands of the colonists.

All this to say that folklore serves the purpose of creating a desired view of national or ethnic circumstances that paint the best possible picture in order to preserve a sense of identity by which a nation or people could rely on for inspiration. I would suggest that the West Country folklore surrounding Jesus in Great Britain acted in a similar manner. For example, Stukeley's deep interest in Stonehenge and British prehistory was motivated by an even deeper interest in preserving religious unity in his country. He, as well as others, attempted to unite the theological controversies in England by demonstrating a common antiquity in the Druids, descendants of Noah and holders of Abraham's religion, whose religion is so extremely like Christianity, that in effect it differed from it only in this; they believed in a Messiah who was to come, as we believe in him that is come.



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Overall, I found Price's treatment of Jesus's missing years intriguing. He has presented his evidence in a clear manner no matter how tenuously documented. His style is readable and theory believable. It is certainly plausible to suggest Jesus traveled during his missing years. The plausibility of his travels to England, while fascinating, must remain forever as simply a theory. The fact is we simply do not have the documentary or archaeological support to suggest with any degree of certainty where exactly Jesus traveled during his missing years. Nevertheless, Price introduces us to an interesting and sometimes compelling description of a theory that many will want to examine further.