Appendix 11a: Joseph of Arimathea and the Line of Nathan-The Throne of Britain: Its Biblical Origin and Future

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Appendix 11: Joseph of Arimathea and the Line of Nathan

The Davidic line of kings that ruled over the ancient nation of Judah came through David's son Solomon. At the time of Judah's fall to the Babylonians in 586 B.C., this lineage, as explained in this publication, was continued by a transferal of the monarchy to Ireland. The Solomonic monarchy was later moved to Scotland around A.D. 500 and, later still, transplanted into England when King James VI of Scotland became king of all Great Britain. Thus, the current British sovereign, Queen Elizabeth II, is a direct descendant of David through Solomon. But she may be descended from another son of David as well.

This possibility revolves around certain people who lived at the time of Jesus—chief of whom is a man referred to in the New Testament as Joseph of Arimathea, who is identified with Britain in medieval tradition. As we will see, it is a rather fascinating story.

The immediate family of Jesus

King David had a number of children. Great honor, of course, went to Solomon, who was blessed with riches and the aforementioned dynasty. Yet the greatest honor actually went to David's son Nathan—for from him descended Jesus Christ. Matthew 1 contains the genealogy of Jesus' adoptive father Joseph—son of Jacob (verse 16)—from Solomon. Luke 3, which lists the genealogy from Nathan, might also seem to be the family record of Joseph—but he is here listed as being the "son of Heli" (verse 23). Actually, the literal Greek says only "Joseph of Heli"—not "son of Heli." Now the genitive "of" does imply "son of" throughout the remainder of the genealogy. But in this case, it is widely acknowledged to mean "son-in-law of"—making Heli the father of Joseph's wife Mary, who truly was the mother of Jesus.

Yet Jesus and Mary were not the only ones mentioned in the New Testament who shared this royal lineage from Nathan. Mary had other children besides Jesus. The people of Nazareth asked regarding Jesus: "Is not His mother called Mary? And His brothers James, Joses, Simon and Judas? And His sisters, are they not all with us?" (Matthew 13:55-56). Indeed, these brothers and sisters were also of the line of Solomon, being children Mary had with Joseph. We also see mention of Jesus' "mother, and His mother's sister, Mary the wife of Clopas" (John 19:25). Jesus' aunt here, also a daughter of Heli, of the line of Nathan, is widely acknowledged from scriptural context to be the "mother of James the Less and of Joses" (Mark 15:40; see verse 47; Matthew 27:56). James the Less is understood to be one of two of the original 12 apostles named James—James the son of Alphaeus ("James," Paul Gardner, editor, The Complete Who's Who in the Bible, 1995, p. 294).

And there is yet another New Testament figure who appears to have been a close relative of Jesus—Joseph of Arimathea. The place name he's identified with occurs in the Old Testament as the home of the prophet Samuel, Ramathaim Zophim (1 Samuel 1:1). The Septuagint Greek translation of the Hebrew Scriptures renders the italicized word as Arimathaim. Also known by its shortened form Ramah, this village is apparently synonymous with modern Ramalleh, a town about five miles north of Jerusalem.

Referred to as a "rich man" and "prominent council member," Joseph was a "good and just man" who "had not consented" to the kangaroo trial that condemned Jesus (see Matthew 27:57-60; Mark 15:42-46; Luke 23:50-53). After Christ's death, Joseph, "being a disciple of Jesus, but secretly, for fear of the Jews, asked [the Roman governor Pontius] Pilate that he might take away the body of Jesus; and Pilate gave him permission" (John 19:38). Then, after preparing it for burial, Joseph laid the body in a rock-hewn tomb in a garden (verses 39-42; and see previous references). The tomb was obviously owned by Joseph, as the Messiah was prophesied to be buried in a rich man's grave (see Isaiah 53:9).

Mark says that Joseph went boldly to Pilate to request the body of Jesus (Mark 15:43)—and just in time. Barnes' Notes on the New Testament comments: "Unless there had been a special application to Pilate in behalf of Jesus, his body would have been buried that night in the common grave with the malefactors [with whom He'd been crucified], for it was a law of the Jews that the body of an executed man should not remain on the cross on the Sabbath [John 19:31]. At this critical juncture, God called forward this secret disciple . . ." (1970, note on Mark 15:43).

Evidence of Joseph's kinship

But on what grounds did Joseph claim the body? Not on his being a disciple, for in the same context we read that he took pains to conceal this fact out of fear of the Jews. Yet how do we square this with the boldness of his request? Let us consider what exactly Joseph was afraid of. It could be that he was concerned the Jews would come after him as they had Jesus. Perhaps fear of reprisal had kept him from revealing that he was a disciple in the past—and his boldness now was in taking an action that revealed him for what he was.

However, there is another way to understand Joseph's specific fear in this instance and his action taken. We later discover that under no circumstances did the Jewish authorities want Jesus' body to fall into the hands of His disciples—out of worry that the disciples would dispense with it and concoct a resurrection fable (Matthew 27:62-66). Thus Joseph likely feared, in approaching Pilate, that if it became known he was a disciple, the Jewish authorities would pressure the governor into refusing Joseph's request for Christ's body.

Therefore it seems that Joseph must have approached Pilate on some other basis. Simple friendship with Jesus? No. Besides appearing as patronage and discipleship, there would have been another hurdle to jump.

"The Sanhedrin had declared Jesus a criminal. According to both Roman and Jewish law, unless the body of an executed criminal was immediately claimed by the next of kin, the body of the victim was cast into a common pit, whereas with others, all physical record of them was completely obliterated. Certainly, the fanatical Sadducean element of the Sanhedrin who sought the total extinction of Jesus, even in death, would have allowed nothing short of a legal claim on the body of Christ" (E. Raymond Capt, Traditions of Glastonbury, 1983, p. 20). The Jewish authorities, who hated and despised Jesus, would surely have resisted his being given an honorable burial in a private tomb—unless there were irrefutable grounds in favor of Joseph receiving the body.

Therefore, we may infer from these verses that Joseph was a close relative of Jesus. This probably accounts for the boldness of Joseph's request—not bold in the sense of facing his fears but bold because it was an assertion of his rights to Christ's body. No other family members of Jesus are mentioned as coming forward. His legal father Joseph, last mentioned when Jesus was 12 years old (Luke 2:44-52), had evidently died long before—Jesus being referred to in Nazareth as "the carpenter, the son of Mary" (Mark 6:3).

Mary herself was in no state to deal with the matter—and this would not have been a woman's responsibility anyway. Jesus' brothers were probably in their 20s or teens, perhaps considered too young to assume responsibility over the family—and thus to take care of this unsavory business. Or they could have been away—or were perhaps simply afraid to be associated with Jesus at this time.

In, then, steps Joseph of Arimathea—again, evidently a close relative. By some traditions this wealthy relative had become an adoptive father of the family after the death of Mary's husband Joseph. More specifically, "Joseph of Arimathea is by Eastern [Orthodox] tradition said to have been the younger brother of the father of the Virgin Mary" (Richard W. Morgan, St. Paul in Britain, 1860, 1984, pp. 69-70 footnote)—thus making him Mary's uncle and Jesus' great uncle. Mary's father Heli was essentially a royal prince of the Davidic line of Nathan—and so would Heli's brother have been. So Joseph of Arimathea may well have been of royal blood. (Some claim an earlier tradition reckoned Joseph as the brother of Mary and thus Jesus' direct uncle—which would still have made him of the same family.)

The noble decurio

Joseph was, as we've seen, described as a "prominent council member" (Mark 15:43). The original Greek here is euschemon bouletes. The Amplified Bible gives this as "noble and honorable in rank and a respected member of the council." The first Greek word here can mean noble in character or, evidently, in birth: "The women who are incited against [the apostle] Paul in Acts 13:50 are 'prominent [euschemon],' as are those in Acts 17:12. They belong to a higher social stratum" (Theological Dictionary of the New Testament, Logos Software).

Of the second word we are told regarding Joseph, "He is also called by St. Mark and by St. Luke a bouleutes, literally, 'a senator,' whereby is meant a member of the Sanhedrin or supreme council of the Jews" ("Joseph of Arimathea," The Catholic Encyclopaedia, 1910, Vol. 8, Online Edition, 1999, www.newadvent.org/cathen). Yet because this is a "non-Jewish designation" for the council (The Bible Knowledge Commentary, Logos Software, note on Mark 15:52-53)—applied to advisors of gentile officials in Acts 25:12—some say Joseph's office was "in the [Roman] state, and that he was one of Pilate's privy council; [but] his post rather seems to have been . . . [as] one of the great Sanhedrim of the Jews" (Matthew Henry's Commentary on the Bible, Logos Software, note on Mark 15:42-47). This we understand from Luke's comment that Joseph did not vote with them to condemn Christ (Luke 23:50).

Still, the Greek words euschemon bouletes could be properly read as "noble senator" in the Roman world of the first century—in fact, even in this case since the term senate could denote governing councils of subject nations such as the Sanhedrin: "senatus . . . the Roman senate . . . [but] used also of similar bodies in other nations" ("senatus," The Classic Latin Dictionary, 1941). However, when the Catholic "church father" Jerome produced, in the late 300s, the first version of the Vulgate, the earliest Latin translation of the Bible, he rendered the Greek words above as nobilis decurio.

In the word nobilis we can obviously see the English word "noble." But what of the Latin word decurio? Besides being a military title, "decurio was applied to a member of the local council or senate of a colonia (a community established by Roman citizens and having full citizenship rights) or municipium (a corporation and community established by non-Romans but granted certain rights of citizenship). Qualifications were numerous, and the position was regarded as an honour. The decuriones had wide powers in local administration, finance and judiciary proceedings" ("Decurio," Encyclopaedia Britannica, Micropaedia, 1985, p. 953). Perhaps Jerome had access to more information about Joseph.

The apocryphal Gospel of Peter says Joseph was a friend of Pilate. Information in such sources is often inaccurate, but it is entirely possible that Pilate knew and respected him, which may have added to his readiness to hand over Jesus' body (of course, this alone would not have been enough to secure the body).

In any event, it seems that Joseph was a man of considerable means. Not just wealthy—but also quite influential. In medieval tradition, he is called Joseph de Marmore, which may bear on that. Some recognize marmore as the Greek and Latin word marmor meaning "marble"—or perhaps quarried "stone" (Abingdon's Strong's Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible: "Greek Dictionary of the New Testament," 1890, 1981, No. 3139; "marmor," Classic Latin Dictionary). Others see Marmore as a place name. There's La Marmore, the highest peak in Sardinia, the Sea of Marmore between the Aegean and Black Seas, and the Roman province of Libya in North Africa known as Marmarica—all of these evidently named after marble.

Yet there may be another possibility. Joseph seems to have been a wealthy nobleman of Judah with broad influence, certain rights of citizenship and perhaps even a high enough social standing to have regular personal interaction with the Roman governor. Indeed, by tradition he appears to have been a royal prince of the line of David—which would have given him even further status with the Jews. Is it possible, then, that Marmore was actually a title reflective of Joseph's status?

In Hebrew the words mare morah would mean "lord dread" or "dread lord" (Strong's: "Hebrew and Chaldee Dictionary," Nos. 4172, 4758)—that is, a lord to be properly feared and respected. Such a title has made its way into more recent times. Note how the Pilgrims referred to the British king in the Mayflower Compact of 1620: "We whose Names are underwritten, the Loyal Subjects of our dread Sovereign Lord King James, by the grace of God . . ." Indeed, this has been a rather common way of addressing kings for millennia.

If Joseph bore such a title, it is conceivable that medieval authors, who would likely not have understood it, wrote it down as Marmore, thinking of it as a place he was identified with. Or perhaps they considered it to mean quarried stone, maybe drawing a connection between quarrying and a rather strong tradition surrounding Joseph—his involvement in tin mining in southern Britain.

Glastonbury traditions

We should consider the traditions connecting Joseph with Britain. Regarding him the Encyclopaedia Britannica states: "according to all four Gospels, a secret disciple of Jesus, whose body he buried in his own tomb . . . Joseph is accorded a long history in later literature [much of it mythical] . . . In Robert de Boron's verse romance Joseph d'Arimathie (c. 1200), he is entrusted with the Holy Grail (cup) of the Last Supper. A mid-13th-century interpolation [a textual alteration believed by scholars to have been made to a 12th-century work by the English historian William of Malmesbury] relates that Joseph went to Glastonbury (in Somerset, Eng[land]) . . . as head of 12 missionaries dispatched there by the Apostle St. Philip" ("Joseph of Arimathea, Saint," 1985, Micropaedia, Vol. 6, p. 621).

It is generally agreed that William's original did mention the mission sent by Philip and that Glastonbury's founding went back to the time of Christ. Glastonbury is identified by many as the mysterious Isle of Avalon in the stories of King Arthur. Notice this regarding the remains of an old church there: "Glastonbury Abbey, a ruined abbey in Somersetshire, about 6 miles south of Wells, England. Tradition has it that it was here that Joseph of Arimathea established the first Christian Church in England" (Collier's Encyclopedia, 1959, Vol. 9, p. 120). The Encyclopaedia Britannica, 11th Edition, states: "According to the legends . . . the first church of Glastonbury was a little wattled [or thatched] building erected by Joseph of Arimathea as the leader of the twelve apostles [that is, the 12 "missionaries" mentioned earlier] sent over to Britain from Gaul by St. Philip" ("Glastonbury," Vol. 12, on-line at 81.1911encyclopedia.org/G/GL/GLASTONBURY.htm).

An old saying from the English countryside, believed to be a refrain of an ancient miners' song, maintains that "Joseph was a tin man." Indeed, as mentioned, this is understood to mean that he was involved in tin mining and, more importantly, the tin trade with the Mediterranean. Many believe that he actually came often to Britain during the life of Jesus, perhaps even before—and that after Christ's death and resurrection Joseph came again, this time as an evangelist. This whole story sounds fabulous, to be sure. Yet was it a complete invention of the late Middle Ages—or was it a tradition that went further back? And could there be some actual truth in it?

To answer the first part, there appears to have been a reference to Joseph being at Glastonbury from a certain Melkin, identified as Maelgwyn of Llandaff (ca. 480-550), ruler of Gwynedd in North Wales who was educated at the same school the well-known early British historian Gildas was: "John of Glaston, their [i.e., Glastonbury Abbey's] last historian, writing at the beginning of the fifteenth century . . . quotes in support of the actual burial of Joseph in the cemetery [there] . . . an ancient British historian, named Melkin, who lived before Merlin [the historical Welsh bard Myrddin], and wrote concerning the mission of St. Philip's disciples; that they died in succession, and were buried in the cemetery: 'Amongst them Joseph of Marmore, named of Arimathea, receives perpetual sleep. And he lies in linea bifurcata near the south corner of the oratory, which is built of hurdles [wattle].'

"It is worth remarking here that when [Henry VIII's royal antiquarian John] Leland visited Glastonbury, about 1540, Abbot Whiting admitted him to the library of the monastery, in which he found a fragment of Melkin's history, Historiolam de rebus Britannicis: an author, as he tells us, entirely unknown to him. He read this fragment with great interest and pleasure, and found in it the very narrative quoted above. Doubtless the manuscript was the identical one employed by John of Glaston, whose chronicle was unknown to Leland. Melkin was placed by Leland in his catalogue of British writers, and figures accordingly in the works of his copyists" (Robert Willis, The Architectural History of Glastonbury Abbey, 1866, chap. 2, on-line at **vrcoll.fa.pitt.edu/medart/image/England/glastonbury/mainglastonbury.html**). If legitimate, this puts the first known historical mention of Joseph at Glastonbury 700 years before the mention generally accepted as first by modern scholarship.

Tin mines of southern England
What, then, of any truth in the stories? As elsewhere pointed out in this publication, the tin trade with Britain had been going on since the days of the Phoenicians ("Industries, Extraction and Processing," Encyclopaedia Britannica, 1985, Macropaedia, Vol. 21, p. 424). In the ancient Mediterranean world, the British Isles were referred to as the Cassiterides, the "Tin Islands"—the primary source, along with Spain, of Mediterranean tin. This was still the case in Roman days. "The Cornish tin mines [of Cornwall in southwest England] were famous by the time the Romans conquered Great Britain in the 1st century AD" (p. 424).

Other metals were mined in Britain as well. "Specimens of Roman-British lead (from the

Mendip mines [near Glastonbury]) have been found in various parts of the Roman Empire. About 1950 an ancient Roman drain-pipe, bonded with lead, was found at Ostia, the sea-port of Rome. Analysis showed the lead had been mined in the Mendips" (Capt, p. 35).

Furthermore, there is evidence that Jews were involved with some of these mines, as explained by Dr. Bernard Susser, a Jewish rabbi, in his 1993 book The Jews of Southwest England, originally written as his 1977 Ph.D. thesis at the University of Exeter in England. It is available on-line at www.eclipse.co.uk/exeshul/susser/thesis. In it he states: "Jewish settlement in Devon and Cornwall, the two most South-Westerly counties of Great Britain, began in the remote mists of Biblical and Roman times . . .

"The presence of smelting ovens in Cornwall and Devon which are called 'Jews' Houses' or 'Jew's Houses' (White's Devonshire Directory (1850) . . . p. 41 . . .) may point to early Jewish participation in the mining industry . . . This type of oven was in use from the second century B.C. until about 1350 A.D. and was called by eighteenth century tinners 'a Jew's House' (A.K. Hamilton-Jenkin, The Cornish Miner (1962), p. 68f . . .). The tin from a Jew's House was known as 'Jew's House tin' (W.C. Borlase, Antiquities of Cornwall (1769), p. 163. See also T. Hogg, Manual of Mineralogy (1828), p. 74, and Journal of the Royal Institution of Cornwall, IV (1871), 227) . . .

"Jews may have had at least one well established trading centre in Cornwall in the pre-Roman period, as the town Marazion (this name is itself suggestive of Hebraic origin, meaning either 'sight of Zion' or 'bitterness of Zion') was anciently known as Market-Jew, and the main street of Penzance which leads to it is even today called Market-Jew Street. Nor is this the only town in Cornwall whose name is said to be Hebraic in its origin. There is also the village of Menheniot, which name, a correspondent to the Jewish Chronicle suggested, is derived from the two Hebrew words, min oniyot, which mean 'from ships' (JC [Jewish Chronicle], 1 June 1860) . . . It is worth noting that much of the evidence which points to Jewish settlement or influence in Britain during the pre-Roman period, relates in the main to Devon and Cornwall" (preface and chap. 1).

Jews in Roman Britain

The Roman period began when Julius Caesar invaded in 55 B.C., defeating native forces the following year—although Britain wasn't truly "Romanized" for some time. "The inhabitants, referred to collectively as Britons, maintained political freedom and paid tribute to Rome for almost a century before the Roman emperor Claudius I initiated the systematic conquest of Britain in AD 43. By 47, Roman legions had occupied all the island south of the Humber River and east of the Severn River. The tribes, notably the Silures [whom we'll see further mention of shortly], inhabitants of what are now the Wales and Yorkshire regions, resisted stubbornly for more than 30 years, a period that was marked by the abortive and bloody rebellion in 61 led by the native queen Boudicca. At this time Britain became an imperial province of Rome, called Britannia, administered by Roman governors. About 79, Roman legions subdued the tribes in

Wales and established partial control over those in Yorkshire" ("Britain, Ancient," Microsoft Encarta 2001).

Dr. Susser discusses this period: "Were there Jews in Roman Britain? This question has been considered by Dr. [S.] Applebaum [in his article "Were There Jews in Roman Britain?" (Transactions of the Jewish Historical Society of England, XVII, 1950 p. 205), even the possibility] . . . that there were some Jewish traders who were connected with the import of pottery, glass and oriental [i.e., Eastern Mediterranean] wares. They may even have formed small communities at Colchester, York, Corbridge and London . . .

"The archaeological evidence relates to finds of coins and pottery. According to Dr. Applebaum, Near Eastern coins of the Roman period found in Dorset and Devon show an early connection between those areas. A close analysis of these coins indicates that Exeter was one of the first ports of call for sea-traffic coming from the Mediterranean up the Channel. Analysis of the coins also shows that they mainly originate from Antioch, Chalcis, Cyrrhus, Hierapolis, Edessa, Samosata, Zengma and Singara, all of them towns with a high percentage of Jews in their population (Applebaum, "Roman Britain," p. 190). The particularly strong link between Exeter and the Near East makes it likely that there were some early Jewish associations with that city" (chap. 1).

Dr. Susser further says: "A persistent legend also refers to the presence of at least one Jew in England at the beginning of the Christian era. He was Joseph of Arimathaea, a wealthy Essene Jew who, it is said, out of sympathy with Jesus gave him burial in a rock tomb near Jerusalem . . . (Jewish Encyclopaedia (New York, 1901) . . .). A variant of the legend makes Joseph travel through Cornwall accompanied by Jesus . . . This legend may be the folk memory of some ancient time when one or more notable Jews visited England" (chap. 1).

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