

The Silent Years: About Glastonbury: Joseph of Arimathea in Glastonbury: Source Articles: *The Encyclopaedia Britannica*, 1926; *The New Encyclopaedia Britannica*, 1979; *The Leading Facts of English History*, 1923; *The International Standard Bible Encyclopaedia*, 1956; *The Oxford Guide to People & Places of the Bible*, 2001; *The Traditions of Glastonbury*, 1982

C. About Glastonbury

Capt's basic premise is founded on the claim that Joseph of Arimathea was appointed by the apostle Philip to head a missionary troop to evangelize Britain. This claim is substantiated from six sources:

GLASTONBURY. The town lies in the midst of orchards and water-meadows, reclaimed from the fens [marshlands] which encircled Glastonbury Tor [a high craggy hill], a conical height once an island, but now, with the surrounding flats, a peninsula washed on three sides by the river Brue.

The lake village discovered in 1892 proves that there was a Celtic settlement about 300–200 B.C. on an island in the midst of swamps, and therefore easily defensible. British earthworks and Roman roads and relics prove later occupation. According to the legends which grew up under the care of the monks, the first church of Glastonbury was a little wattled building erected by Joseph of Arimathea as the leader of the twelve apostles sent over to Britain from Gaul by Philip.¹

William of Malmesbury [English historian; c. 1090–1143] says that he [Joseph of Arimathea] was sent to Britain by Philip, and, having received a small island in Somersetshire, there constructed “with twisted twigs” the first Christian church in Britain—afterwards to become the Abbey of Glastonbury.²

Glastonbury, market town and borough, county of Somerset, England, lying on slopes that rise from the Brue Valley to a tor of 522 feet.

In 1892, low mounds 1½ miles north of Glastonbury were found to contain remains of prehistoric Iron Age dwellings; and these along with two other famous groups of mounds at Meare (3¾ miles northwest of Glastonbury), were excavated early in the 20th century. At the time of habitation the dwellings stood on low-lying ground of peat bogs and watercourses. The types of pottery found indicate occupation from c. 60 B.C. unto about the time of the Roman invasions of the 1st century A.D.

Legends, dating from the mid-13th century, claim that the early Christian Joseph of Arimathea came to the town.³

Christianity introduced into Britain. Perhaps it was not long after [the death of Queen Boadicea \bō-ad-a-sē'-a\ in A.D. 60], that Christianity made its way to Britain; if so, it crept in so silently that nothing certain can be learned of its advent.

The first church, it is said, was built in Glastonbury, in the southeast of the island. It was a long, shedlike structure of wickerwork. “Here,” says an old writer [Thomas Fuller’s “Church History of Britain”] “the converts watched, fasted, preached, and prayed, having high meditations under a low roof and large hearts within narrow walls.”

At first no notice was taken of the new religion. It was the faith of the poor and the obscure, and the Roman generals treated it with contempt; but as it continued to spread, it caused alarm.

¹ *The Encyclopaedia Britannica*, 13th ed. (New York: The Encyclopaedia Britannica Co., 1926), 12:112–13.

² *Ibid.*, 15:514.

³ *The New Encyclopaedia Britannica: Micropaedia*, 15th ed. (Chicago: Encyclopaedia Britannica, 1979), 4:570.

The Roman Emperor was not only the head of the state, but head of religion as well. He represented the power of God on earth: to him every knee must bow. But the Christians refused this homage. They put Christ first; for that reason they were dangerous to the state, and were looked upon as traitors and rebels, or as men likely to become so.⁴

Joseph of Arimathea. “A counselor of honorable estate.” Or member of the Sanhedrin (Mark 15:43; Luke 23:50) ... and “himself was Jesus’ disciple” (Matthew 27:57; John 19:38). Although he kept his discipleship secret “for fear of the Jews” (John 19:38), he was yet faithful to his allegiance in that he absented himself from the meeting which found Jesus guilty of death (cf Luke 23:51; Mark 14:64). But the condemnation of his Lord awakened the courage and revealed the true faith of Joseph. On the evening after the crucifixion he went “boldly” to Pilate and begged the body of Jesus. There is a fine touch in that he himself took down the body from the cross [Mark 15:46].

Legends of a later origin record that Joseph was sent by Philip from Gaul to Britain along with 11 other disciples in 63 AD, and built an oratory at Glastonbury.⁵

Joseph of Arimathea. Apocryphal writings variously present Joseph as caring for Mary after the Ascension, as the patron of Glastonbury, England, and as involved in the Grail saga.⁶

These six sources document the “legend” of Joseph of Arimathea’s presence in the southwest of England at Glastonbury. None mentions the presence of Jesus there during His silent years.

Therefore, Capt takes that legend, draws conclusions from several New Testament passages that imply Jesus did not spend His silent years in Palestine, and deduces that Joseph took Him to England where He studied Old Testament Scripture.

Capt’s conclusions must be considered no more than conjecture at best and fantasy at worst. However, I will present to you his rationale with the intent of dramatizing the importance of those 17 years during which we know nothing about our Lord’s whereabouts but are confident about what He was doing with His time.

To be able to fulfill the demands imposed upon Him for executing the salvation plan of God, Jesus had to be completely prepared to confront and suppress the overwhelming challenges to His free will. Lucifer and his spokesmen would offer ever-increasing pressure upon the Lord’s human volition to strike back mentally, verbally, or physically against their temptations.

Hebrews 4:15 - We do not have a high priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but One who has been tempted in all things as we are, yet without sin.

This passage indicates the fulfillment of Isaiah’s prophecy:

⁴ D. H. Montgomery, *The Leading Facts of English History*, rev. ed. (Chicago: Ginn and Co., 1923), 14–15.

⁵ C. M. Kerr, “Joseph of Arimathea,” in *The International Standard Bible Encyclopaedia*, gen. ed., James Orr (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1956), 3:1741.

⁶ Amy-Jill Levine, “Joseph of Arimathea,” in *The Oxford Guide to People & Places of the Bible*, eds. Bruce M. Metzger and Michael D. Coogan (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), 164.

Isaiah 53:9 - His grave was assigned with wicked men, yet He was with a rich man in His death, because He had done no violence, nor was there any deceit in His mouth.

In his book, Capt describes the discovery of the Glastonbury Lake Village which was flourishing during the first century A.D. and allegedly was visited by Joseph of Arimathea accompanied by the young Messiah, Jesus of Nazareth:

In prehistoric times, village communities flourished on the shores and the many islands that dotted this tidal-swamp between Glastonbury and the sea.

Perhaps for the sake of greater security, some of the villages were built in the shallow waters of large freshwater lakes. These were not far from the higher ground on which they grew their crops and grazed their sheep and cattle. Three such communities were found near Glastonbury, erected on built-up platforms of stones, clay, brushwood and peat. Excavations of the sites of these “lake villages” have provided a surprising amount of information about the inhabitants. The most noted of these excavations was at the Glastonbury Lake Village. (p. 14)

The site of the village lies a little more than a mile from the center of the present town of Glastonbury. Archaeological excavations found that the village covered an area of three to four acres and consisted of about ninety huts varying from 20 to 30 feet in diameter. They were circular in shape, with baked clay or stone slabbed hearth in the center.

Glastonbury Lake Village was constructed in or about 50 B.C. and remained inhabited until about A.D. 80, when it appears to have suffered destruction by fire. Therefore, it was in existence and inhabited during the life of Jesus of Nazareth. Its inhabitants were highly cultured, and skillful in various kinds of work. (p. 15)

The men of Glastonbury were expert carpenters. They made dug-out canoes over twenty feet long that enabled them to make long coastal trading voyages up and down the shores of the Bristol Channel and even across the rough stretch of water of the South Wales Coast. They constructed wheeled carts for transporting their crops and other loads by land. The wheels were nearly three feet across with twelve spokes skillfully fitted into a strong wooden axle-box. Their iron tools were well-balanced, with shapely wooden handles. They created perfectly-turned wooden bowls, artfully decorated in incised abstract patterns; a craft that survives unchanged in Wales today. (p. 16)

Glastonbury communities enjoyed their peace and prosperity in an age of ever-growing violence and strife. They undoubtedly possessed the most advanced civilization of their time in Britain. It is this period of time and place that provides the setting of our “Preface”—a created story—based on the earliest of the ancient traditions relating to the beginning of Jesus’ missing years—years centering around the figure of Joseph of Arimathea.⁷ (p. 18)

Capt sets the stage for a society that would be receptive to the Lord’s training in carpentry while isolated in the remote southwestern peninsula of Britain, a perfect place for the Lord to seclude Himself in His studies.

⁷ E. Raymond Capt, “Glastonbury,” in *The Traditions of Glastonbury*, rev. ed. (Muskogee, OK: Artisan Publishers, 1982), 14–16, 18.