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DID JESUS GO TO INDIA?

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*As lightning comes out of the East,
and shines directed to the West--so
shall also the coming of the Son of
Man be.*

--Matthew 24:27

What did Jesus Christ do from the time he was twelve to the age of thirty? We are aware of his miraculous birth. The Bible also records the famous temple scenario at age twelve. Then we are reintroduced to him at age thirty, being baptized at the River Jordan. With all due respect for his accomplishments after that--we are left with eighteen years unaccounted for.

Unimportant? I don't think so. If we are to accept that Jesus Christ changed the face of the earth in a three-year ministry--and he did--then eighteen missing years becomes vitally important. In the life of a person who is considered God incarnate by many--and at least a great saint by others--every moment is valuable. Every gesture is instructive. Every pastime is precious.

But the bible is silent about the missing years. Since 1947 a veritable storehouse of scrolls and fragments has been discovered at the Dead Sea in Israel and at Nag Hammadi in Egypt. While these discoveries did shed new light on first century Palestine and biblical culture in general, they had very little to say about "the lost years of Jesus," as the eighteen years have come to be called.

Still, the newly discovered manuscripts served to illuminate our understanding of innovation and interpolation in Western religious literature, especially in regard to noncanonical works known as the Apocrypha and the Pseudepigrapha. These were officially considered heretical by the Roman church but were originally part of the Christian literary tradition. Through the Dead Sea and Nag Hammadi finds, scholars became aware that organized Christendom was highly selective in its promulgation of transcendental truth. There was much the Church was keeping from us--and we wanted to know all the details.

(Note: This manuscript was returned to the author with a request for correct referencing. He has adjusted the manuscript significantly to comply with the request but has not supplied page numbers for all of his quotes. As the deadline for publication was close, it was decided that his manuscript would be published regardless of these omissions rather than exclude it from the issue.)

Thus, many began to reconsider the eighteen missing years of Jesus. Books by theologians, religionists and independent researchers inundated the market. Reverend C.F. Potter, for instance, released an informative book in 1962, The lost years of Jesus revealed. Scholars Anne Read and J. Furst informed the world of Edgay Cayce's work in this area by each publishing their own fascinating book on the subject. In 1976, Andreas Faber-Kaiser contributed his exceptional work, Jesus died in Kashmir, which not only thoroughly explained what happened during the eighteen missing years but also postulated a convincing and revolutionary theory of what transpired after the crucifixion, when Jesus was taken down from the cross (We will return to this Kashmiri hypothesis later). And perhaps the most recent work on Jesus' eighteen missing years is by Elizabeth Clare Prophet, whose comprehensive book, The lost years of Jesus, deals with every nuance of the subject. It should be noted, furthermore, that all of the above researchers, among others whom we shall soon mention, have found (to their satisfaction) that Jesus did indeed travel to India.

The most famous contemporary work in this area, however, comes from a husband-and-wife team, Dick and Janet Bock, whose painstaking research bore fruit in a film, The lost years (1978), and a book, The Jesus mystery (1980). Says author and filmmaker Janet Bock (1980) "It gradually dawned on us that those years were missing because some-one had taken them out of the records, out of the Bible. We could not imagine Jesus would have appeared in Galilee at the age of 30 and hidden the major part of his life from his disciples whom he loved and asked to follow him. And it really doesn't seem possible those years were so unimportant as to be dismissed without a word....So the idea grew that at some point what had been known about those years in his life had been deleted. In examining historical records of the early Christian Church, it became evident that early Church councils, especially the First Council of Nicea in 325 A.D., changed many points of doctrine....Those missing years were expunged because they did not coincide with the political needs of a growing Church."

Research in the last forty years, by the Bocks and the others mentioned above, unveiled a controversy obscured since the latter part of the last century and the early part of this one. This controversy, about Jesus' travels in India, began in 1894, when a Russian journalist, Nicolai Notovitch, published a mysterious and provocative book entitled The unknown life of Jesus Christ.

Just after the Turko-Russian War, it seems, Notovitch began a journey to the Orient. By 1887 he arrived in Kashmir, where he had heard of a Buddhist convent in Leh, the capital of Ladakh. Out of curiosity and perhaps providence he decided to visit the monks of Leh. There he was told of an ancient document. The lama in charge was quite secretive but he did reveal that the document was about the life of Saint Issa (the Latin spelling of Jesus is Jesus; in arabic, it is Isa). It should be mentioned,

moreover, that Isa is the Sanskrit root for the word Isvara, an Indian name for God literally meaning "the Supreme Controller."

The original Pali manuscripts, Notovitch was told, were to be in the palace of the Dalai lama, and these were even copies of older Sanskrit versions. Copies of these copies existed in several Buddhist monasteries along the countryside. Notovitch realized that he was fortunate enough to be at one of these monasteries.

The desire to see these scrolls now becoming an obsession, Notovitch offered the head lama three gifts--an alarm clock, a watch, and a thermometer--hoping that the Buddhist priest would be so kind as to show him the life of Saint Issa in return. He had no success.

As he was leaving the monastery, however, Notovitch hurt his leg in a riding accident and was forced to return, much to his good fortune. At his bedside, the chief lama, now taking care of him, finally unveiled two big volumes in cardboard covers. This, the lama thought, would make the weary Russian traveller happy. Indeed it did. Here, written on decaying leaves, was the biography of Saint Issa.

Notovitch's leg quickly healed but not before he could secure an interpreter for the Issa manuscript. Noting down the story word for word, Notovitch soon returned to the West and published The unknown life of Jesus Christin 1894.

The book informs us that at age thirteen Jesus left the home of Mary and Joseph in Nazareth. He travelled with a merchant caravan to the holy cities of India and even to the sacred Ganges River. Later, he left Egypt to penetrate the mysteries of the Great Pyramid. Heading back, he explored the diverse philosophies of Athens and Persepolis. He returned to Israel eighteen years after he had left.

It should be noted here that Levi H. Dowling's popular book The Aquarian Gospel is now known to be derived from Notovitch's work. Published in 1908, just fourteen years after Notovitch published The unknown life, Levi claimed his book was a psychic document, given to him by revelation. Naturally, the academic world was skeptical and claimed it was simply plagiarism. With a few embellishments and Levi's personal beliefs infiltrating the book, it largely tells the same story as Notovitch's authoritative work.

According to the ancient manuscript found by Notovitch, Jesus spent six years learning and teaching the scriptures of India (the Vedas) in Jagannath Puri, Benares, and other cities in the state of Orissa. It was there that his philosophy began to take shape. Although he found great value in Vedic knowledge, he saw how such knowledge could be misused. For instance, the brahmin priests, the intellectual class, were exploiting the lower classes,

especially the Shudras, teaching that the knowledge of the Vedas was only for the upper crust. Jesus found this repugnant. Love of God was for every man, woman and child.

Jesus then took it upon himself to rectify the situation, and he began teaching Vedic knowledge to the Shudras. Thus he began his activities as a religious reformer, which would make history as he applied it when he returned to the West. There, the Pharisees were teaching a legalistic religion. Jesus reminded them of the spirit behind the law.

In Notovitch's work, too, we see Jesus warning the caste-conscious brahmins that they have forgotten the true teachings of the Vedas. To be sure, the Vedas taught the principle of class distinction. But this was originally according to qualification and work. In Orissa, at the time, the whole concept had become distorted, and people were claiming caste rights according to birthright. If a child were born into a brahmin family, that child was considered a brahmin--even if the necessary qualifications, such as cleanliness, austerity, mercy and truthfulness were lacking. Jesus sought to put an end to this hypocrisy.

The original Vedic idea, however, was fully accepted by Jesus, and history relates how he incorporated these ideas when he returned to Palestine. Every human being, Jesus taught, should worship God according to his/her capacity and work. This concept is decidedly Vedic, wherein everyone--according to capacity and work--fits into particular categories or "castes" naturally. And these castes were considered equal in that they facilitated a particular kind of service to the Supreme. Some fit into the intellectual caste (brahmin); some were administrators (kshatriya); others were traders and merchants (vaishya); while still others fit into the working class category (shudra). But all were equal in the eyes of God. No wonder, therefore, we find Jesus castigating the "brahmins" for their misrepresentation of Vedic knowledge. They were not actually brahmins, at least not by qualification and spiritual understanding. Indeed, the British were to criticize the caste system nineteen hundred years later for a similar reason.

Either due to pure ignorance or impure motivation, the brahmins of Orissa plotted against Jesus' life, again indicating that they were not actually brahmins. It is against the brahminical code to kill in any way, shape or form whatsoever. This is extended to the point that most brahmins are strict vegetarians. After several unsuccessful attempts on the life of Jesus, we find the master fleeing Jagannath Puri, never to return again.

The Issa story informs us that, after escaping, Jesus journeyed to Nepal, deep into the Himalayas. There he spent another six years teaching the science of spirituality. Onward to Persia, where he preached against the concept of two gods, one of good and one of evil. As he denounced the concept as a primitive form of polytheism, Jesus was not well-received by

the Zoroastrians who believed in the battle between the two gods. "There is only one God," Jesus (Issa) taught, "and that is our Father in heaven."

The next part of the Issa manuscript (and thus Notovitch's book) is almost exactly the same as the Bible account with which we are so familiar, complete with Pontius Pilate, the crucifixion, and the Apostles. Thus, what the ancient Buddhist manuscript offers is a possible explanation of Jesus' activities during the eighteen missing years, of which the Bible says nothing.

At this point most readers will probably maintain their initial skepticism. After all, except for the word of a Buddhist monk and a Russian traveller, there is no concrete evidence that the manuscript actually exists, or that its contents are true. What's more, most readers are probably unsure as to whether travel between Palestine and India was possible in those days. Furthermore, and perhaps most importantly, just why would Jesus want to go to India anyway? These are the subjects we will now address.

While it may be difficult to ascertain the authenticity and validity of the Issa manuscript, it is not impossible. In fact, even the Church's attitude on the subject is enlightening. When confronted with the subject by Notovitch, they backed off. Sometimes posing arguments and other times simply ignoring his work, they always seemed fearful, as if they had something to hide, some secret to protect.

According to Elizabeth Clare Prophet (1984, pp. 23-25) Cardinal Rotelli opposed Norovitch's work because he felt it was "premature," that the world was not ready to hear it. "The Church suffers already too much from the new wave of atheistical thought," Rotelli (Prophet, 1984, pp. 23-25) said to Notovitch. The cardinal was obviously fearful of losing followers who were already skeptical of Church doctrine. They didn't need another obstacle to overcome.

In Rome, Notovitch displayed his version of the Issa manuscript before a cardinal who was close to the Pope. Propher (1984, pp. 23-25) quotes the nervous prelate as saying "What would be the good of publishing this? You will make yourself a crowd of enemies. If it be a question of money that interests you...?" Notovitch is reported as not taking the hint. He published his book instead.

As time passed, Notovitch was to find that the Vatican library contained sixty-three manuscripts which refer to the Issa story, antique documents which were brought to Rome by Christian missionaries preaching in China, Egypt, Arabia and India. "No wonder Church officials acted funny," Notovitch is said to have realized. "The Issa story is not something new to them" (Prophet, 1984, pp. 23-25). Notovitch further speculated that one of those missionaries to India might even have been St Thomas, who, according to the Catholic Encyclopedia, evangelized India and all quarters

from the Persian Gulf to the Caspian Sea.

This brings us again to the question of first century travel between Palestine and India. The apocryphal Acts of Thomas describe the Apostle as preaching the gospel and performing miracles in the land of the Ganges. What's more, Notovitch was quick to point out, Thomas could not have preached in his native Greek, or even in Hebrew, for the people of India only spoke various dialects of Pali and Sanskrit (McBirnie, 1981, p. 12). So it is entirely probable that he learned the language and even had something to do with the Issa manuscript (being one of the only followers of Jesus in India at the time).

As far as Thomas' preaching in India in the first century, it is beyond doubt. Scholars have conclusively proven that there were trade routes connecting East and West, routes commonly frequented. Land routes reached North India (where Issa travelled), while the sea routes approached the south. Thus no one denies that Thomas ostensibly preached in India. As it was possible for him, it was possible for Jesus.

There is, however, even more conclusive evidence for Thomas' travels in the Orient. According to scholar William Stuart McBirnie (1981, p. 12) "It has already been pointed out that the sea route to South India was well used in Roman times for the purpose of the pepper trade, and that Roman gold and silver coins from the early centuries of our era have been discovered in Malabarese (South Indian) soil. Moreover, startling numismatic evidence has established the existence of both King Gondophares and his brother Gad as historic figures and not simply legendary characters. Their names have been found on excavated coins and in a Gandhara inscription fixing their rule ar about 19-45 A.D. in Scytho-India in the Indus valley (McBirnie, 1981, p. 23). According to the Acts of Thomas, the Apostle travelled to India with a King Gondophares, who had a brother named Gad. Modern scholarship thus totally endorses the contention that Thomas went to India. The Roman Catholic Church, in fact, now considers the Cathedral of St. Thomas at Mylapur (a suburb of Madras) to be a Basilica, acknowledging that it stands over the tomb of the Apostle. He was buried in India after dying the death of a martyr (D'Souza, 1972, p. 5).

As a matter of fact, Issa's tomb is also allegedly in India, for the Kashmir hypothesis contends that Jesus returned to India after the crucifixion. The believing Christian will question this, proposing that Jesus had to die on the cross for our sins and only then would we be saved.

It may raise some Christian eyebrows, however, to become aware of the following little known facts of life. Pope John XXIII openly declared in 1960 that it was through Christ's blood that man (sic) was saved and that his death was inessential for this purpose. In other words, the Kashmir hypothesis does not necessarily contradict Christian dogma. Jesus may

have been crucified, but he didn't have to die on the cross.

With this in mind, we should review the idea of Jesus dying in Kashmir and see what light, if any, it sheds on the life of Saint Issa. As mentioned earlier, German journalist A. Feber-Kaiser was so convinced about the hypothesis that he wrote a penetrating book, Jesus died in Kashmir, which thoroughly explains the whole Issa story (before and after the crucifixion).

According to the account, Jesus survived the crucifixion and again travelled East, this time under the name Yuz Asaf. Settling in Kashmir, the story goes, Jesus married and died a natural death in his old age. A community of Jews in Srinagar, the capital of Kashmir, are still reverential toward an old crypt where for generations they have believed Jesus, or Issa, as they call him, is buried.

The premise of Faber-Kaiser's book is quite substantial, supported by Notovitch's work, complex biblical interpretations, and very early Arabic texts. The Koran itself, in fact, clearly states that Jesus did not die on the cross. "They did not kill him, they did not crucify him. It only seemed to them to be so" (Koran, 155-57). Later, Muslim historian Imam Abu Ja'far Muhammad al-Tabri commented, "Isa and his mother, Mary, had to leave Palestine and travel to a distant land, wandering from country to country." The Kashmir hypothesis thus serves to harmonize Christianity and Islam, settling centuries-old disputes. The Christians say Jesus was crucified. The Muslims say he did not die on the cross. The Kashmir hypothesis offers a possible explanation and accommodates both the Christian and Muslim perspectives.

There is more compelling evidence. Jesus died in Kashmir includes sixteen impressive pages of charts, wherein linguistic parallels are drawn between place, tribal, and caste names from Kashmir and those found in the bible. Further, Faber-Kaiser refers to the ancient Bhavishya Purana (part of the Vedic canon), which was written in Sanskrit 5 000 years ago by the sage Vyasadeva. As a scripture which includes prophesy, it is on a par with the bible. Faber-Kaiser paraphrases from the Purana (two volumes edited by Chatterjee in 1976, specifically this paraphrase came from pp. 81-84): "(Maharaja) Shalewahin went out one day to walk in the mountains, and in Voyen, near Srinagar, saw a distinguished person dressed in white and with a fair complexion. The (Maharaja) asked him his name. Jesus answered that he was known as the son of God and was born of a virgin. The (Maharaja) was surprised, but Jesus explained that he was telling him the truth and that his mission was to purify religion. When the (Maharaja) renewed his questioning, Jesus told him that he had proclaimed his ministry in a country far beyond the Indus, and that the people had made him suffer. He had preached of love, the truth and purity of heart, and that for this reason he was known as the Messiah." In this same Bhavishya Purana, Jesus also mentions preaching in the land of "the Amalekites" who are a non-Jewish sect that is nevertheless clearly connected to early biblical

tradition.

All prophesy in the Purana, it may be noted, is worded as if the event had already transpired, and this is a common device in prophetic literature. Still, the actual scenario mentioned above did not occur until three thousand years later, that is to say two thousand years ago. Thus, even the Vedic literature has some mention of the Issa story, proclaiming that Jesus did in fact travel to India.

Notovitch was convinced of these facts. But Swami Abhedananda, a noted disciple of Ramakrishna, was not. In fact, he was quite skeptical and in 1922 he decided to trek into the arctic region of the Himalayas. He had briefly heard of Notovitch's exploits and, as a scholar, he had to find out for certain. Did the Issa manuscripts actually exist or was Notovitch a fraud as many Church authorities (and Abhedananda himself) were inclined to believe (Ready, 1964, pp. 6-10). The Swami went in search of a manuscript.

The results were startling. When he returned, he published a book of his travels entitled Kashmiri O Tibetti. The book tells of his visit to the Buddhist monastery and how he had the Issa manuscript read to him and translated into his native Bengali. Abhedananda soon realized that his text was almost exactly like the work of Notovitch. He was now a believer.

It may be noted that both Notovitch and Abhedananda had to have the manuscript translated. They could not read the Pali manuscript for themselves. Scholars were thus skeptical upon their return to the West. The two enthusiastic researchers may have been sincere but what if there were a mistake in translation? Or what if the monks deceived them?

This problem, however insubstantial, was settled once and for all by Nicholas Roerich and his son, George. In 1925, artist, philosopher and distinguished scientist, Nicholas Roerich set out for the Himalayas on an expedition. Amazingly, with no connection to Notovitch and Abhedananda, he came upon the Issa manuscript. What's more, his son, George who happened to be travelling with him, was proficiency in various Indian dialects, including Pali. They read the manuscript firsthand, took notes, and recorded it in their travel diary. Years later, the value of this diary became apparent.

According to Elizaeth Clare Prophet (1984, p. 15), "Nicholas Roerich's Central Asiatic Expedition lasted four and a half years. In that time he travelled from Sikkim through the Punjab and into Kashmir, Ladakh, Karakorum, Khotan, and Irtysh, then over the Altai Mountains and through the Oyrot region into Mongolia, Central Gobi, Kansu and Tibet." After all of his travels, Roerich was prompted to write, "We were touched at how widespread is the story of Issa" (Prophet, 1984, p.15). While it remains a question for the West, Issa lives in the hearts of the Indian people. And

that's a fact that can't be ignored. The bible too agrees that there are also many other things which Jesus did, which, if they were written every one, the world itself could not contain the books.

Postscript

While the reader may be ready to admit that Jesus could have feasibly travelled to India, we are left with the question posed earlier: Why would he want to go? There are many superficial reasons which come to mind immediately, and they can be easily understood. Some say he was searching for the three wise men, who, it may be remembered, came from the East. Faber-Kaiser speculates that he was looking for the ten lost tribes of Israel. Others say that, due to persecution, Jesus and Mary, along with St Thomas, fled for a land that might be richer in understanding, a land of tolerance and peace.

Although any and all of these answers may be true, this author contends that the issue runs deeper, that Jesus, who was preaching an entirely metaphysical doctrine, was searching for a land steeped in spirituality. The Jews were concerned with the here-and-now. Jesus, however, claimed that his kingdom was not in the material world but in the kingdom of God, in heaven. India's teachings, disparaged as "other worldly" by Jewish critics, was more in line with the mystical teachings of Jesus.

Writer Alex Jack, in an informative feature article in Eastwest (1978, pp. 86), said it most eloquently. "Jesus' journey symbolizes the quest for wisdom, the search for wholeness. The East, then as now, signified the mysterious half of the soul, the hidden consciousness, the higher mind, the intuitive dimension of the psyche which mainstream Greek and Hebrew civilizations de-emphasized or ignored."

This doesn't necessarily mean that Jesus himself was in search of wisdom and wholeness. As the Son of God, he may have indeed been perfect from birth. But as the Messiah, the perfect teacher, Jesus was pointing the way. For those of us in search of the Absolute Truth, Jesus pointed East. Even as the sun rises over the Orient, the Eastern light comes back to us who wait patiently in the West.

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