

Christopher Columbus a Spiritual Giant

Compiled by Glen W. Chapman- November 2001



In August 1877 Christopher Columbus along with others appeared to Wilford Woodruff in the Newly dedicated St. George Temple and demanded that he receive vicarious baptism into the kingdom and reminded that they had fulfilled their preparation of for the founding of the restored gospel and it was their right to receive these temple ordinances. James G. Bleak Clerk to Brigham Young reported: “I was present in the St. George Temple and witnessed the appearance of the Signers , Christopher Columbus, the spirits of the Presidents...also others...Who demanded their baptism and endowments be done.”

Columbus’ history-making journey to America opened the door to a flood of exploration, colonization, missionary work and fortune-seeking. But, more important, it was fulfillment of prophecy uttered more than 2,000 years earlier and established Columbus as a forerunner to the restoration of the gospel.

Some six centuries before the birth of Jesus, the prophet Nephi recorded what he saw in vision:

“And I looked and beheld a man among the Gentiles, who was separated from the seed of my brethren by the many waters; and I beheld the Spirit of God, that it came down and wrought upon the man; and he went forth upon the many waters, even unto the seed of my brethren, who were in the promised land.” (1 Ne. 13:12.)

Christopher Columbus

Discover OF THE NEW WORLD 1451-1506

“God made me the messenger of the new heaven and new earth of which he spoke in the Apocalypse of St. John after having spoken of it through the mouth of Isaiah; and he showed me the spot where to find it.”

Columbus did not see himself as solely responsible for the discovery of what he felt were the Indies. He acknowledged the hand of God in his work. “When I was very young,” wrote Columbus “I went to sea to sail and I continue to do it today. . . . I have found Our Lord very well disposed towards my desire, and I have from him the spirit of intelligence for carrying it out. He has bestowed the marine arts upon me in abundance and that which is necessary to me from astrology, geometry, and drawing spheres and situating upon them the towns, the rivers, mountains, islands and ports, each in its proper place.” To King Ferdinand and Queen Isabel, Columbus wrote:

I spent six years here at your royal court, disputing the case with so many people of great authority, learned in all the arts. Finally they concluded that it all was in vain, and they lost interest. In spite of that [the voyage to the Indies] later came to pass as Jesus Christ our Savior had predicted and as he had previously announced through the mouths of His holy prophets. [Here Columbus’s *Book of Prophecies* contains some scriptural references: Psalm 2:6—8, Psalm 18: 43—44, Psalm 22:27—28, Isaiah 14:1—2, John 10:16, etc.]

If what I myself say does not seem to be sufficient evidence of this, I offer that of the Holy Gospel, which says that everything shall pass save for His marvelous Word. And in saying that, it says that everything must come to pass as it has been written by Him and by the prophets. . . . I have already said that reason, mathematics, and mappaemundi were of no use to me in the execution of the enterprise of the Indies. What Isaiah said was completely fulfilled.

Columbus’s efforts to convince his king and queen to let him do what God had for him to do are reminiscent of Moses’ efforts to fulfill his divine role. Like Moses, he sought permission from his sovereign with relentless persistence, then led the people out of a captivity of ignorance. Columbus even “parted” the waters so the children of Israel could cross to the promised land. And like Moses, Columbus sought to lift the veil of paganism to give the people a knowledge of Christ.

Little is known of Columbus’s family, but there has been much speculation about it. Columbus was the eldest son of Domenico Colombo, a weaver, and Suzanna Fontanarossa. He was born in or near Genoa. From his home, Columbus gained a depth of feeling for spiritual things. His brother Bartholomew, a noted navigator of the time, was devoted to Columbus and to Columbus’s work.

Columbus wrote to a member of the royal court: “*I am not the first Admiral of my family. Let them call me, then, by what name they will, for after all, David, that wisest of kings, tended sheep and was later made king of Jerusalem, and I am the servant of Him Who raised David to that high estate.*”

Columbus had a somewhat ruddy complexion and is reported to have had blue eyes and a freckled fair complexion which stood out in contrast to some of his darker companions. He left to sail the seas at the age of fourteen. His son Ferdinand described an incident that occurred to his father during this time. Columbus was on a ship, returning from Flanders when it engaged in battle with a foreign ship. The two ships grappled and men crossed from boat to boat; the slaughter on both sides was without mercy. The fight lasted most of the day until the ships began to burn. To keep from being burned alive, the survivors had to jump overboard, even though for

many this meant certain death. An excellent swimmer, Columbus was able to swim to shore, although land was more than two leagues away (the equivalent of six miles). He found an oar, which, his son

Since his ships usually sailed from Portugal, Columbus made his home there and worked as a map maker. While on shore, Columbus frequented the Convent of the Saints, where he attended mass. There he met a religious lady of minor nobility~ Dona Felipa Moniz Perestrello, whom he later married. It was only fitting that he should find her in his chosen place of worship.

Columbus's deceased father-in-law had been the governor of an island belonging to Portugal, an island situated near the edge of the known parts of the western ocean. He had also been a sea captain and had a good collection of maps. The young couple moved in with Felipa's widowed mother, who saw the interest Columbus had in the maps and she gave him her husband's collection. These maps excited him and strengthened his conviction of a western route to the Indies. Marriage seemed to mature Columbus's convictions, and he began in earnest to bring about the work to which he had been called.

Columbus and his wife soon moved to the island of Santo Porto. Here he learned that strange items had been washed upon the shores of the local beaches, including carved pieces of wood unlike any in Europe. There were huge hollowed out carved pine-tree trunks, which he would later discover were made by Indians and called "canoes." Most significant, the bodies of two dead men washed up on shore. Their features differed from those of the known races, the known world of Columbus's day extending on the north to Iceland and Scandinavia, south to a cape 100 miles south of the Equator, to the east as far as China and Japan, and to the west as far as the Azores.

After Marco Polo's travels were highly publicized, Columbus felt it was an opportune moment to approach the king of Portugal. But the King of Portugal merely sent him to a board of "learned men," who scoffed at his ideas and turned down his request for a western voyage. Soon after, Columbus's wife died, and Columbus returned to Spain with his young son.

In Spain Columbus became again the subject of criticism.

Many churchmen assailed him because he maintained the existence of inhabited lands on the other side of the earth. His presumption implied to them the presence of nations not descended from Adam, because it was impossible for those inhabitants to have crossed the ocean. According to the ecclesiastical leaders, Columbus's belief was an attempt to discredit the Bible.

In spite of such criticism, Columbus worked steadily to obtain his goal. He sent his brother to England, in the hope of obtaining support for his ideas. He also knew that if he were to convince Queen Isabel and King Ferdinand, he would need the backing of learned men of the day. With that in mind, he wrote to Paolo Toscanelli, the leading savant of Italy and probably the most knowledgeable cosmographer of his day. Toscanelli responded with a copy of a letter that he had previously written to a friend in Portugal. He stated that from all his research and knowledge, there definitely had to be land to the west.

Armed with this information, Columbus approached the sovereigns of Spain. But Spain was in the midst of one of the last great battles against the Moors, and so they, too, referred Columbus to a board of learned men. Again, Columbus's visionary plan was rejected. Queen Isabel, feeling impressed that Columbus's work was of great importance, told him not to give up and to try again, and for six long years Columbus appealed to the court. However, the court would not listen while Spain was at war. Some believed that God gave victory to Isabel and Ferdinand in the

Battle of Granada so that they would be able to support Columbus's plan.

Hopeful that the king and queen would personally listen to his proposal, Columbus returned to court and was again referred to the group of learned men. In despair, Columbus decided to visit the King of France, having already sent his brother to seek support from the courts of England.

In his *Book of Prophecies*, Columbus quotes an ancient writer who prophesied that the person who would open the way for the return to Mount Zion would come out of Spain. Columbus felt that his voyage to the west would help open the way for the reinstatement of Jerusalem and the fulfillment of the prophecy. Nevertheless, the mission itself mattered more than from where the support came, and so he set off for France.

Stopping at the mission of La Rabida to pick up his son, Columbus gained the sympathetic ear of the friars, particularly the good Prior Perez (who had been the queen's confessor). The prior believed Columbus and sent for his very educated friend, Dr. Garcia Hernandez. Dr. Hernandez agreed with the prior, and at last Columbus received support from some ecclesiastical and secular leaders.

Prior Perez left immediately for the royal court, and his endorsement convinced Isabel to grant permission for Columbus's voyage. After meeting with Perez, she sent a messenger to bring Columbus back. Columbus told the queen what he needed for the trip and also asked for certain rewards. Some people point to these rewards as evidence that Columbus sought only glory and wealth. However, Columbus was to be granted the rewards only if he discovered something of value that was approved by the king and queen. Columbus wrote, "*I want it understood that I will not put prices high or low to valuables or land that I discover. I have the authority from your Royal Highness to decide or not to decide but only under your authorization.*"

Many people in court did not believe Columbus's theory, but they still felt Columbus was greedily asking for titles and tenths (the rewards that Columbus had requested). Ironically, those in court who felt he was greedy in asking for titles and tenths were the same people who believed there was nothing on the other side of the world to be found.

Upon obtaining approval from the royal court, Columbus went to Palos, Spain, to purchase ships and obtain supplies. With the help of the Pinzón brothers, who became captains, they were able to take on fairly good crews. The three ships, *Niña*, *Pinta*, and *Santa Maria*, set sail on 2 August 1492.

The crew left Spain filled with great apprehension about the trip. The voyage lasted much longer than Columbus expected, rations ran low, and the men became mutinous and wanted to turn back. During this time Columbus wrote that he stood in need of God's help as much as Moses had when he was leading the children of Israel out of Egypt. The Israelites dared not lay violent hands upon Moses on account of the miracles God had wrought in his behalf, and the crew dared not resort to violence toward Columbus for much the same reasons. Soon the grumbling returned, and the other two captains met with Columbus in his cabin. They informed him that they could no longer restrain the men. Columbus asked for three more days, and the two captains agreed.

Columbus did not record what happened after he shut the door behind the two captains. Surely he must have poured his heart out to God as he had never done before. They were so close to

victory, and he knew it. He seems to have received some sort of assurance. That night, Columbus entered into his journal that his name was now to be *Christo-feren*, meaning “Christ bearer.”

The next day, the crew pursued what they thought was land. All day long they followed the sighting only to discover that it was a cloud. However, this pursuit was not in vain as the ship covered more than double the leagues ever traveled in one day. Birds began appearing in abundance, and the crew found a branch with berries on it, floating in the water. They knew that land was not far away.

The Pinzón brothers felt that they should turn northward. But Columbus’s sense of “dead reckoning” had them stay on course. On 11 October, at about 10 o’clock P.M., Columbus was walking on the deck, when he suddenly saw a light straight ahead that seemed to rise and fall as if someone were walking with a candle or lantern. Columbus called to those near him, and they agreed the light was definite enough that it must have come from land. About two hours after midnight, they spotted land.

At daybreak they saw an island. On shore there were people running to see their ships approach. After the anchors were dropped, Columbus and his men went ashore in their finest silks and velvets. With royal banners of their sovereigns in hand, Columbus knelt on the sand and kissed it. Tears of joy were streaming from Columbus’s eyes as he rendered thanks to Almighty God and christened the island San Salvador (“Holy Savior”), in honor of

Columbus explored several islands, and established a fort at La Navidad, then set sail for Spain. The return trip was not without danger. As his ships came near the Azores, there arose one of the worst storms ever recorded in history. The storm raged for fifteen days. Finally, they were able to put in at the Azores, but when they left these islands, they were met by another raging storm that caused critical damage to the vessels. It required all Columbus’s skills and experience to guide his broken ship into the Lisbon port. The people there were ecstatic to greet Columbus and his crew. The king of Portugal treated him kindly. Then he traveled to Spain. What a glorious day for that great kingdom and for the Christian queen who had always believed in Columbus!

Columbus made three more trips to the new world, and then his health gave out. Disheartened with the greed and lust that were wreaking havoc in the newly discovered land, in 1496 he wrote to the king and queen, begging that the same laws existing in Spain be applied to the islands, and that all people — including the Indians — have the same justice.

He wrote: “*Procure for the Indians, that are coming under our rule, the same rules and protections as those we have been speaking of [here in Spain]. These rules are to apply to those in power and those not in power equally. I want them to have the same protection like I have as if they were my own flesh.*” In 1497, he pleaded again:

I worry immensely about the future. I do not know what will happen in years to come. But we will discover new lands and we will negotiate in some of them according to the law of Castile and if this is not ruled by a strong hand then we will lose and rip apart our future and we will lose everything. I am-i afraid we will be misunderstood. I tell you to do it this way because gold is not everything.

To his good friend, Amerigo Vespucci, Columbus said: “*I feel persuaded, by the many and wonderful manifestations of Divine Providence in my especial favor, that I am the chosen instrument of God in bringing to pass a great event—no less than the conversion of millions who*

are now existing in the darkness of Paganism”~

Columbus died on 20 May 1506 in the city of Valiadolid, Spain. His dying words were “In manus tuas, Domine, commendo spiritum meum,” which translated means “into thy hands, Lord, I commend my spirit.”

[Columbus] Beheve[d] that he was predestined....[I]n the *Book of Prophecies* [he included] ... a prophetic passage taken from ... a popular devotional work attributed to St. Augustine, evok[ing] the inevitability of [his] personal destiny.... “*Before you formed me in the belly, you knew me, and before I left the womb, whatever pleased you was preordained for me. And those things that concerned me were written in your book, in the secret of your counsel.*” (Watts, “Prophecy and Discovety,” 94; and see West and Kling, *Lihro de las Projecias*, 141.)

Columbus opened the *Boo/c of Prophecies* with a letter to the king and queen. “*With a hand that could be felt, the Lord opened my mind to the fact that it would be possible to sail from here to the Indies, and he opened my will to desire to accomplish the project. This was the fire that burned within me when I came to visit Your Highnesses. All who found out about my project denounced it with laughter and ridiculed me.. ..Only Your Majesties had faith and perseverance. Who can doubt that this fire was not merely mine, but also of the Holy Spirit who encouraged me with a radiance of marvelous illumination....*”

Columbus also declares in the *Book of Prophecies*: “*The working out of all things was entrusted by our Lord to each person, [but it happens] in conformity with his sovereign will, even though he gives advice to many... I found our Lord well-disposed toward my heart’s desire, and he gave me the spirit of intelligence for the task... .Who doubts that this illumination was from the Holy Spirit? He [the Spirit], with marvelous rays of light, consoled me through the holy and sacred Scriptures, a strong and clear testimony,... encouraging me to proceed, and, continually, without ceasing for a moment, they inflame me with a sense of great urgency.*” (Fols. 5 rvs., 4)

(from the book Other Eminent Men of Wilford Woodruff by Vicki Jo Andetrson, Nelson Book,37777 West Juniper Road, Malta,Idaho, 1994, pp. 113-121)

In a letter to the Spanish Hierarchy Columbus wrote:

“... *our Lord unlocked my mind, sent me upon the sea, and gave me fire for the deed, Those who heard of my enterprise called it foolish, mocked me, and laughed. But who can doubt but that the Holy Ghost inspired me.*” (Church News, Week Ending September 26, 1992)

Several modern-day prophets have testified that Columbus was guided by the Spirit, fulfilling Book of Mormon prophecy.

President Ezra Taft Benson stated in 1976 that “God inspired ‘a man among the Gentiles’ who, by the Spirit of God, was led to rediscover the land of America and bring this rich new land to the attention of the people in Europe. That man, of course, was Christopher Columbus, who testified that he was inspired in what he did.” (*The Teachings of Ezra Taft Benson*, p. 577.)

President Spencer W. Kimball, as a member of the Council of the Twelve, also gave testimony that the Lord directed Columbus. He said in 1950 that the Lord “inspired a little boy, Christopher Columbus, to stand on the quays in Genoa, Italy, and yearn for the sea. He was filled with the desire to sail the seas, and he fulfilled a great prophecy made long, long ago that this land chosen above all other lands, should be discovered. And so when he was mature, opportunity was granted him to brave the unknown seas, to find this land. . . and to open the door, as it were” (*The Teachings of Spencer W. Kimball*, p. 427.)

The Lord prepared Columbus for his great mission on earth long before he made his discovery. Columbus was

an ardent student of the Bible. He had great religious faith. He had a deep testimony of a personal and living God.

One gains an insight of his character from a couple of paragraphs he wrote in a letter to his son Diego just before embarking on his last voyage:

"I command and charge you to be very devote in giving the tithes of all the monies you shall have, be they from rents, or from any other source, give in service of our Lord to the poor and needy, and to relatives, before others; and if there are none where you are, set it apart to send it to them; if you do this, you will never lack what you need, because Our Lord will provide.

"I commend you that you honor all the people with whom you come in contact and that you treat them well from the greatest to the least, because they are people of God Our Lord. He will honor you, and will make you prosper, if you honor His people; and if you mistreat any one of them, Our Lord will mistreat you; and He will afflict you, if you afflict anyone. Therefore, be merciful, and be assured that He will be merciful to you." (Coleccion d Documentos para la Historia de Costa Rica relativos al Cuarto y Ultimo Viage de Cristobla Colon, p. 14.)

Historians are not at a loss for references by Columbus which boldly declare that the Lord directed him in his great undertaking. His journals and other personal writings are replete with such statements. Referring to his first voyage to America, he once stated:

"Who can doubt that this fire was not merely mine, but also of the Holy Spirit who encouraged me with the radiance of marvelous illumination from his sacred Holy Scriptures, by a most clear and powerful testimony ... urging me to press forward? Continually, without a moment's hesitation, the Scriptures urged me to press forward with great haste." (*The Libro de las profec'ias of Christopher Columbus*, p.105.)

The anticipation and drama that builds during the first voyage is almost unparalleled in human history. Inasmuch as he sailed into the unknown, with the crew on the verge of mutiny in the final days, it is apparent that every decision he made was crucial to the success of his expedition.

In *The Geographical Conceptions of Columbus*, (p. 43), George E. Nunn asserts that Columbus "did not make a single false move the entire voyage."

Before 1492, other navigators had tried unsuccessfully to explore westward from the Azores Islands (800 miles off the coast of Portugal). Although the Azores were the western-most islands known in the Atlantic, Columbus chose to deviate from this course, sailing from Palos, Spain, on Aug. 3, 1492, to the Canary Islands (off the west coast of Africa). From there, he launched his voyage into the vast unknown.

In so doing, he successfully caught the trade winds coming from the northeast, and avoided the headwinds which flow from the west, in the vicinity of the Azores. This route "is still followed by all sailing vessels as the best possible from any part of Europe to North America." (*The Geographical Conceptions of Columbus*, p. 51.)

Nunn suggests that Columbus' success was the result of "an application of reason to knowledge." Columbus, however, gives credit to the Lord. Even though he was a successful seaman and an accomplished navigator, he said, "*Our Lord opened to my understanding (I could sense His hand upon me), so that it became clear to me that it was feasible to navigate from here to the Indies.* (*Christopher Columbus' Book of Prophecies*,

(Church News, Week Ending September 26, 1992)

"God gave this man the keys to the awesome seas, he and no other unlocked the darkness," wrote Bartolome de Las Casas in *History of the Indies*. (p. 35.)

After exploring the islands of the Caribbean for three months, Columbus prepared for the return trip to Europe. The Admiral's chosen route for his homeward journey is yet another example of his being inspired of God. He did not return to Spain by the same sea passage that carried him to America. Instead, he sailed northeast and caught winds coming out of the west that would take him back across the Atlantic to the Azores. Once again, Nunn asserts that Columbus' navigational decisions were remarkable:

"So much has been said about his discovery of America that it has been lost to sight and thought that he also discovered both of the great sailing routes in the North Atlaz~ (*Geographical Conceptions*, p. 50.)

With no prior trans-Atlantic sailing experience, how did Columbus enjoy such good fortune on both legs of the trip? Morison, in his Pulitzer Prize-winning biography of Columbus, declares, "there can be no doubt that the faith of Columbus was genuine and sincere, and that his frequent communion with forces unseen was a vitak element in his achievement." (*Admiral of the Open Sea*, p. 65.)

Columbus not only believed that the Lord inspired him on his first voyage, but was also

convinced that the Holy Scriptures prophesied of his great enterprise. During the last years of his life, he was working on a manuscript that he never finished, entitled *Book of Prophecies*. This work includes a collection of prophetic passages, especially from the Book of Isaiah, which he believed pertained to his expedition.

Columbus made four voyages to the New World, lasting eight years and three months in a 12-year period (August 1492 to October 1504.) He commenced his first journey at age 40 and completed his fourth journey at age 53. His first voyage took only seven months; the other three exploratory journeys lasted about 2^{1/2} years each.

Columbus died in 1506, 19 months after completing his fourth journey. His last words were, "*Into your hands O Lord I commend my spirit.*" (*Columbus: The Great Adventure: His Life, His Times, and His Voyages*, p. 248.)

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