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## Columbus: Fulfillment of Book of Mormon Prophecy

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# CHAPTER ONE

## *Columbus: Fulfillment of Book of Mormon Prophecy*

*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 Nephi 13:12

**F**or Latter-day Saints, the story of Christopher Columbus begins long before he was born in 1451. In fact, what he would do was known in prophecy at least 600 years before the birth of Christ, when the ancient American prophet, Nephi, foresaw Columbus' coming to the New World in a vision and recorded what he saw on metal plates. Joseph Smith later translated that account as part of the Book of Mormon. The record of the vision is found in the 1 Nephi 13:12. Nephi declared: "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."

Elder Mark E. Petersen, a modern-day apostle, explained that "the many waters were the Atlantic Ocean," and that "the

seed of [Nephi's] brethren were the American Indians." He also affirmed that "it was Christopher Columbus whom [Nephi] saw, and he observed further that the discoverer was guided by divine power on his journey" (Petersen 3).

Several modern-day prophets have testified that Columbus was guided to the New World by the Spirit of God, fulfilling Book of Mormon prophecy. In 1976, President Ezra Taft Benson stated, "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" (Benson 577).

In 1950, Elder Spencer W. Kimball testified that God "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 to him to brave the unknown seas, to find this land . . . and to open the door, as it were" (Kimball 427).

In 1907, President Joseph F. Smith also confirmed his conviction that the Lord guided Columbus in much the same way as He did Adam and Abraham in the Old Testament (Smith, Joseph F. 31).

Church leaders' statements about Columbus are not restricted to those of the 20th Century, as the apostles and prophets from the beginning of this dispensation also boldly testified that the Lord guided the great discoverer. In 1869, Elder George Q. Cannon delivered an address in the Salt Lake Tabernacle in which he stated: "Columbus was inspired to penetrate the ocean and discover this Western continent, for the set time for its discovery had come; and the consequences which God desired to follow its discovery have taken place" (*Journal of Discourses* 14:55; hereafter *JD*).

At the 1854 Fourth of July celebration in Salt Lake City, President Brigham Young spoke of the Lord's direction of the

events that led to the modern discovery of America: “The Almighty . . . moved upon Columbus to launch forth upon the trackless deep to discover the American Continent” (*JD* 7:13). Elder Orson Hyde, speaking at the same celebration as President Young, made perhaps the most intriguing reference to this theme, connecting Columbus’ voyage and discoveries with the ministry of Moroni, the ancient American prophet and divine messenger and caretaker of the records of the Book of Mormon. Referring to him as the “Prince of America,” Elder Hyde noted that Moroni “presides over the destinies of America, and feels a lively interest in all our doings. . . . This same angel was with Columbus and gave him deep impressions, by dreams and by visions, respecting this New World.” He continued, “The angel of God helped him—was with him on the stormy deep, calmed the troubled elements, and guided his frail vessel to the desired haven” (*JD* 6:368). It is abundantly clear from these and other statements that Church leaders from early on have taught that the Lord was very interested in the success of Columbus’ voyages to and from the Americas.

Columbus left many statements in his journals and other personal writings in which he boldly declare that he believed the Lord directed him in his great undertaking. Referring to his first voyage to America, he once stated, “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. . . . This was the fire that burned within me. . . . Who can doubt that this fire was not merely mine, but also of the Holy Spirit” (West and Kling 105; Columbus most often referred to the New World as the Indies).

## **Forerunner to the Restoration of the Gospel**

One might ask why the Lord was so concerned with Columbus that He guided the discoverer in his preparation for the journey and inspired him along the way. The answer to this question can also be found in the writings of modern-day apostles and prophets. Several have clearly stated that Colum-

bus and also the Founding Fathers of the United States of America were instruments in the Lord's hands in preparing America to become the seat of the Restoration of the Gospel of Jesus Christ in this last dispensation of time.

In 1903, President Joseph F. Smith spoke of the divine destiny of America: "This great American nation the Almighty raised up by the power of his omnipotent hand, that it might be possible in the latter days for the kingdom of God to be established in the earth." President Smith further explained that, "if the Lord had not prepared the way by laying the foundations of this glorious nation, it would have been impossible (under the stringent laws and bigotry of the monarchical governments of the world) to have laid the foundation of the coming of his great kingdom. The Lord has done this" (Smith, Joseph F. 409).

Echoing this same idea, Elder Mark E. Petersen said: "The true gospel . . . could not be given to Israel of today until it was restored, and the restoration could come only under favorable conditions, in a free country, where men could worship God according to the dictates of their own conscience" (Petersen 4). Speaking specifically about the work that Columbus and the Founding Fathers performed, Elder Petersen declared: "These events were preliminary steps leading up to the gospel being restored and taken to the entire house of Israel." He emphasized that, "few people think of the discovery of America, the Revolutionary War, and the establishment of a constitutional form of government here as being steps toward the fulfillment of the Lord's ancient covenant with Abraham. *But it is a fact that they were*" (Ibid. 3; emphasis added).

Finally, George Q. Cannon specifically named Columbus, along with George Washington, Thomas Jefferson, John Adams and Benjamin Franklin as men who "were inspired to do the work they did." He declared that, "it was a preparatory work for the establishment of the kingdom of God. This Church and kingdom could not have been established on the earth if their work had not been performed" (*JD* 14:55).

Latter-day Saints conclude that the Lord inspired Columbus to be a forerunner in preparing the way for the establishment of the kingdom of God on the American continent in this last dispensation. As Elder Petersen explained, “The restoration of the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ in these latter days, together with the advance preparation of conditions which made it possible, was indeed a divine drama which had many stages and many scenes, some of which were world shaking” (Petersen 2). Let us now turn our attention to the life of a man who truly changed the world as he played out his part in this divine drama. That man, of course, is Christopher Columbus, and the scene is the Age of Discovery.