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Abstract: This article argues that various Indian traditions and practices suggest that Jesus Christ visited the American continent, as the Book of Mormon indicates. The author points out archaeological and historical similarities between Jesus and Itzamna, the god of the Mayas, and Quetzalcoatl, the “Fair God” of the Aztecs.



THE GREATEST EVENT IN ANCIENT AMERICA

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My dear brethren and sisters, I desire today to speak briefly upon what I consider to be the greatest event that ever occurred in ancient America—namely, the visitation to the Nephites of Jesus Christ after his resurrection and the great work that he did among them.

Five years before the birth of Christ, Samuel the Lamanite stood upon the walls of the city of Zarahemla and predicted the signs of the birth and of the death of Jesus. He asserted that, at his birth, there should be a day and a night and a day of continuous light as if it were one day, and a new star should appear. Since Jesus Christ is the light and the life of the world, no more appropriate sign or symbol of his birth into mortality could have been given. Neither could a more appropriate sign of his death have been given than three days of darkness, the light and the life going out of the world.

We read in the Book of Mormon, "And it came to pass in the thirty and fourth year, in the first month, on the fourth day of the month, there arose a great storm, such an one as never had been known in all the land.

"And there was also a great and terrible tempest; and there was terrible thunder, insomuch that it did shake the whole earth as if it was about to divide asunder. . . .

"And behold, the rocks were rent in twain; they were broken up upon the face of the whole earth, . . .

"And it came to pass that there was thick darkness upon all the face of the land, . . .

"And there was not any light seen, neither fire, nor glimmer, neither the sun, nor the moon, nor the stars, for so great were the mists of darkness which were upon the face of the land. . . ." (3 Nephi 8:5 ff.)

These tremendous convulsions of nature not only impressed the Nephites greatly so that they recorded them in their history, but the memory of them also stayed in the minds of the Lamanites, or the American Indians, for fifteen hundred years. Shortly after the discovery of America, the Catholic missionaries and explorers learned that the American Indians had a tradition of the

great convulsions of nature that took place at the time of Christ's death. For example, I would like to quote from a Lamanite, an Indian prince named Ixtlilxochitl, who lived near the city of Mexico and wrote his book in 1600 A.D.:

" . . . the sun and the moon eclipsed, and the earth trembled, and the rocks broke, and many other things and signs took place, . . . This happened . . . at the same time when Christ our Lord suffered, and they say it happened during the first days of the year." (*Works of Ixtlilxochitl*, cited in Milton R. Hunter and Thomas Stuart Ferguson, *Ancient America and the Book of Mormon*, p. 190.)

Ixtlilxochitl could not have received his information from Catholic Fathers, because they did not know anything about the great convulsions of nature at the time of Christ's crucifixion. Neither could he have received it from the Book of Mormon, since this book had not yet been published. He claimed to have received his information from a Lamanite source, records handed down from his ancestors. I think Ixtlilxochitl's testimony, coming as it did from the American Indians, is a marvelous evidence of the divinity and truthfulness of the Book of Mormon.

The Nephites readjusted their measurement of time at the time of the signs of Christ's birth. According to the Book of Mormon, Christ lived thirty-three years and four days, being crucified on the fourth day of the first month of their year. Remember, Ixtlilxochitl gave this significant statement, ". . . they say it happened during the first days of the year." To me it is remarkable how accurate the Lamanite record was and how aptly it sustains the Book of Mormon.

The Nephite historian continued his account of the terrible destruction that took place, of cities and people during the three hours of storm, and the distressing condition during the three days of darkness.

Finally, the sun arose. The earth was again filled with bright, radiant light. The Nephites in the city of Bountiful assembled in front of the temple to discuss the great events which had occurred during the past few days, especially the signs of Christ's crucifixion. As they conversed one with another, they heard a voice coming as it were out of heaven. They did not understand what the voice said. It was not a shrill, loud voice, yet it pierced them to the very heart. They gazed upward into the heavens. They heard the voice the second time and the third time, and then they recognized it to be the voice of God the Eternal Father introducing his Son, saying:

"Behold my Beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased, in whom I have glorified my name—hear ye him." (3 Nephi 11:7.)

As they continued to gaze heavenward, they saw a radiant, beautiful Man, dressed in a white robe, descending out of the heavens to the earth. He came down and stood in their midst. Stretching forth his hand, he said:

"Behold, I am Jesus Christ, whom the prophets testified shall come into the world . . . and I have drunk out of that bitter cup which the Father hath given me, and have glorified the Father in taking upon me the sins of the world." (*Ibid.*, 11:10-11.)

The people fell upon their knees and worshipped the Savior. He commanded them to arise and come forward and for each of them to thrust his hand into the spear wound in his side and feel the prints of the nails in his hands and feet, ". . . that ye may know that I am the God of Israel, and the God of the whole earth, and have been slain for the sins of the world." (*Ibid.*, 11:14.) After they had all complied with this request, again the Nephites dropped on their knees and worshipped him, shouting: "Hosanna! Blessed be the name of the Most High God!" (*Ibid.*, 11:17.)

Jesus selected twelve men and ordained them to the priesthood. He commanded them that after his departure they should organize his Church.

Day after day, for some time, Jesus appeared to the Nephites. He taught them the same gospel that he had taught to the Jews in Palestine before his crucifixion. Also, he performed many wonderful miracles among the people in ancient America. He healed the sick, raised the dead, gave sight to the blind, made the lame to walk, and the deaf to hear. Finally Jesus ascended into heaven promising the people that he would return again.

So tremendous was the effect of the visitation of the Resurrected Lord to the Nephites that for two hundred years they lived in perfect righteousness, no sin being among them. Finally apostasy crept in, which resulted in a terrible war between the Nephites and the Lamanites. Eventually the Nephite nation was exterminated. Yet this did not exterminate the knowledge that Christ had visited ancient America and that he had given the ancestors of the American Indians the gospel. For fifteen hundred years, down to the time of the Spanish conquest, the Lamanites, or the American Indians, retained that knowledge. When the Catholic Fathers first came to the New World, they found among the various Indian tribes the tradition and practices of many of the gospel teachings. The religious beliefs and practices, as well as their traditions, were so near like Christianity that many of the Catholic Fathers claimed that the Indians had Christianity before the coming of the Europeans.

From Alaska in the north to the south end of South America, paramount among all the traditions held by the Indians

was that of a "Fair God." In the distant past that God helped create the world and had played a prominent part in organizing man. He had loved the people so much that he had come down to earth and dwelt among the ancestors of the American Indians. He had given them their government, their writing, and their culture. Above all he had given them their religious beliefs and practices, being their great high priest.

In these Indian traditions the various aboriginal tribes gave different names to this white and bearded God; for example, in Mexico Valley he was called "Quetzalcoatl." In Yucatan he was known as "Itzamna" and later he was called "Kukulcan." The most prominent name by which he was known in Peru was "Viracocha." Also, he was called "Tonapa."

Regardless of the name by which the white and bearded God was known, all of the Indian traditions were similar. This fact indicates that they came from a common source. All of the principal events of Christ's life—namely, his virgin birth, the marvelous missionary work that he did, the numerous miracles that he performed, his death, his internment for three days, his resurrection, his ascension into heaven, his final promise that he would come again—were found among the American Indians by the Catholic Fathers when they first visited various parts of the New World.

Father Bernardo de Lizana, "one of the most devout Catholic priests of his time," did missionary work among the Itza-Maya Indians of Yucatan during the first century of the Spanish Conquest. In his *History of Yucatan and Spiritual Conquest*, written in 1633, Lizana maintained that "Chief of the beneficent gods [of the Itza-Mayas] was Itzamna." (Bernardo de Lizana, cited in T. A. Willard, *Kukulcan the Bearded Conqueror* p. 127.)

Itzamna was a God, according to the Maya sacred books, who was held in the highest veneration, being regarded as a universal deity. Father Lizana informs us that the Indians claimed that this person was the Son of the Most High God. Itzamna had come to earth and had lived among the ancestors of the Itza-Mayas. He, according to Lizana, had taught the ancient inhabitants of Yucatan to read and write. He had given them their government and was the founder of their religion. To quote the words of the Catholic Padre Lizana:

"Itzamna was called Kabul, the Skillful Hand, with which he performed miracles, curing the sick by placing his hands on them. He was a king, a priest, a legislator, a ruler of benevolent character, like Christ. . . .

"The people consulted him [Itzamna] about things that happened in some remote parts and he told them of present and future things.

"At the same time they carried their dead to him and he brought them back to life, and the sick got well, and for this he was greatly venerated and with reason, for if it were true that he was a Son of God, who only can give life to the dead, and health to the sick, since it is impossible for an ordinary man, nor the demons, but only the same God [whom the Christians worship], who is the Lord of life and death.

"The people . . . said he resurrected and cured them." (*Ibid.*, pp. 151-152.)

In speaking of the death of Itzamna, Father Lizana wrote:

"Thus passed Itzamna, this reputed Son of God—perhaps our Christian God under another name, and the Itzas believed that his soul went to dwell with his Heavenly Father." (*Ibid.*, pp. 148-149.)

Ixtlilxochitl, the Lamanite Mexican prince, wrote about the coming of Quetzalcoatl or Jesus Christ to the valley of Mexico. He put the date, interestingly enough, at about the time the Savior lived in Palestine. Ixtlilxochitl wrote:

"And when they" [the Toltecs, we would call them the Nephites], "were in the height of their power, there arrived in this land a man whom they called Quetzalcoatl . . . on account of his great virtues, considering him as just, saintly [holy], and good; teaching them by deeds and words the path of virtue, and forbidding them their vices and sins, giving laws and good doctrine. And in order to refrain them from their pleasures and dishonesties, he instituted (established) fasting for them, and [he was] the first who worshipped and placed the cross. . . ." (Ixtlilxochitl, *op. cit.*, p. 203.)

Dr. Herbert Joseph Spinden, one of the world's greatest scholars on the American Indians, stated that Quetzalcoatl is,

" . . . the greatest figure in the ancient history of the New World, with a code of ethics and love for the sciences and the arts." (H. J. Spinden, *New Light on Quetzalcoatl*, *Congreso Internacional de Americanistas*, Paris, 1947.)

Hubert Howe Bancroft wrote:

" . . . Quetzalcoatl was a white, bearded man, venerable, just and holy, who taught by precept and example the paths of virtue. . . . His teachings, according to traditions, had much in common with those of Christ in the Old World." (Hubert Howe Bancroft, *The Native Races*, vol. 5, p. 201.)

Recently Laurette Sejourne, a famous Mexican archaeologist, wrote an excellent book on the religious beliefs of ancient Mexico. Quetzalcoatl plays the leading role in that book. The writer states that at approximately the time that Jesus Christ founded the Christian religion and culture in Palestine, which has continued to the present time, a man-God—a super-religious genius named Quetzalcoatl—lived in ancient America and established the culture of the

Indians. He gave them their religion, portions of which lasted for 1,500 years, down to the time of the Spanish conquest. I shall quote from Laurette Sejourne.

"His [Quetzalcoatl's] essential role as founder of ancient American culture was never questioned by any of the historians of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, who always state that, just as our era began with Christ, so that of the Aztecs and their predecessors began—approximately at the same time—with Quetzalcoatl.

"Who, then was this primordial figure, and why was his memory so ardently worshipped? As we know, that during his reign . . . the social and religious views that dominated Meso-America for over 1,500 years were crystallized. We must think of him first as an organizer without equal.

"But whence did this statesman derive the power which enabled him to amalgamate and transfigure the cultural elements he had inherited . . . into so dynamically homogeneous a system? He must evidently have been possessed of some quite exceptional interior strength, and all that is known about him corroborates this view." (Laurette Sejourne, *Burning Water—Thought and Religion in Ancient Mexico*, pp. 25-26.)

Certainly the only person who has ever lived in this world who could have crystallized the social and religious views which dominated ancient America for over fifteen hundred years prior to the Spanish conquest, that primordial figure who lived and did his unique work in the New World about the time that Christ established the Christian era in the Old World, that religious genius who is supreme over all other religious teachers known, could have been none other than Jesus the Christ, the resurrected Savior who did such a phenomenal work among the Nephites. Thus the resurrected Savior and Quetzalcoatl and the other "Fair Gods" of ancient America are identical.

As all Latter-day Saints know, the story of Christ's work in ancient America is beautifully told in the Book of Mormon, and so that record proclaims the greatest event that ever occurred anciently on the Western Hemisphere.

I bear testimony that through the power of the Holy Ghost I know that Jesus is the Christ, the Savior of the world, your Savior, and my Savior, and as he claimed, the God of the entire world. I know that he died for your sins and my sins. I witness that he broke the bands of death and brought about a universal resurrection. I testify that he restored his gospel in this dispensation, and if you and I will keep his commandments, someday we shall return into his presence and receive a blessed exaltation.

May God bless us to this end, I humbly pray, in Jesus' name. Amen.