



Type: Magazine Article

---

## A Man of Destiny

Author(s): E. Cecil McGavin

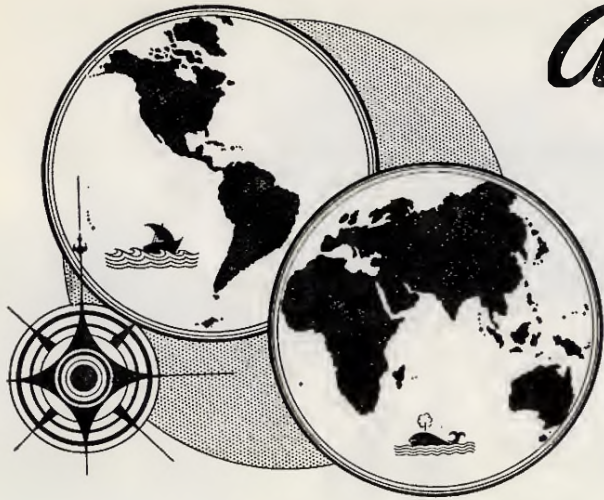
Source: *Improvement Era*, Vol. 42, No. 10 (October 1939)

Published by: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints

Page(s): 600, 628

---

**Abstract:** This article describes how the voyage of Christopher Columbus was foreseen by the Book of Mormon prophets. The spirit of the Lord “wrought upon the man.” Columbus wrote to King Ferdinand of his desire to spread the word of God as foretold by the prophet Isaiah in chapters 24 and 64. His journal excerpts show his loyalty to God and his own knowledge of his divine appointment. He recorded that an angel appeared to him and gave him keys to “bind the oceans” and to link the continents.



# A MAN OF DESTINY

By E. CECIL MCGAVIN

Instructor at the East High School L. D. S. Seminary, Salt Lake

A STORY OF DISCOVERY—IN WHICH THE LEADING CHARACTER DID THAT WHICH THE PROPHETS HAD FORESEEN.

SOON after the Nephites landed upon the shores of the New World, one of their prophets beheld a glorious vision in which was portrayed the destiny of this choice land. Among other things he recorded:

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.)

History indicates that the man among the Gentiles upon whom the Spirit of God wrought was Christopher Columbus.

When we recall that the three small ships which brought Columbus and his band of convicts to the New World were unseaworthy little barges in which people today would be afraid to venture far upon an inland lake, we realize how he must have been imbued with the spirit of the Almighty to enable him to brave the storms and maintain faith in the dangerous expedition.

The largest of his trio of vessels was "sixty-three feet over all in length, fifty-one feet along her keel, twenty feet beam, and ten and a half in depth." (John Winsor, *Christopher Columbus*, p. 184.)

In the year of his success Columbus wrote to King Ferdinand: "I came to your Majesty as the Emissary of the Holy Trinity, to spread the Holy Faith, for God speaks clearly enough about these lands through the mouth of the Prophet Isaiah, where it is said that 'His name shall be proclaimed abroad from Spain.'" (Jacob Wassermann, *Christopher Columbus*, p. 46.)

Wassermann continues: "In the same way, before that pious assemblage in San Esteban, he insisted that he must be regarded as one inspired. The passages in Isaiah that he forcibly interpreted to his own ends are to be found in the 24th and 64th chapters: 'From the uttermost parts of the earth we have heard songs,' and 'I will build a new heaven and a new earth.' The religious element in Columbus is no pretext of embellishment, nor does it rest upon any dogmatic view of life; it is the very heart of the man himself."

When reminded that the main object of his expedition was to find gold, he exclaimed: "I am determined to find much gold, so much that the subjects of Her Royal Highness will be rich enough to reconquer the kingdom of Jerusalem." (Marius Andre, *Columbus*, p. 46.)

His thoughts never smacked of the mercenary spirit, but were dedicated to a holy and spiritual purpose. In the latter part of September, 1492, a white dove flew over the ships. The great admiral shouted: "Let God be praised."

The historian Ober gives the following appraisal of Columbus: "Religious and devotional, Columbus attended church with regularity, and it was while in the chapel of a convent at Lisbon that he first saw the lady who became his wife." (F. A. Ober, *Columbus*, p. 10.)

"This church," continues Ober, "was occasionally attended by Columbus while awaiting the outfitting of his fleet; but he oftener worshipped in the chapel at the monastery, where he passed in prayer the greater part of the night before he sailed. . . . Evasion and

subterfuge could suffice to detain their heaven-sent quest no longer."

In his journal for October 12, 1492, Columbus recorded: "I gave the name of San Salvador (Saint Savior) in remembrance of His High Majesty, who hath marvelously brought all these things to pass."

Always the humble navigator ascribed to God the inspiration which prompted his great discovery. Later he wrote this modest panegyric of himself: "I have received from Him the spirit of understanding. He has made me very skillful in navigation; knowing enough in astrology; and so in geometry and arithmetic. God has given me genius, and hands apart to draw this globe [having reference to a map he had prepared]; and on it the cities, rivers, islands, and all parts, in their proper places." (Aaron Goodrich, *Christopher Columbus*, p. 148.)

In a letter to his royal sponsors, he recorded: "Then let the King and Queen, and the princes, with their very happy kingdoms, in concert with the Christian world, render thanks to our Lord Jesus Christ, who has accorded us such a victory, and such a grand success! Let there be processions; let solemn feasts be celebrated; let the temples be embellished with boughs and flowers; let Jesus Christ exult with joy on earth, as He rejoices in heaven, at the approaching salvation of so many peoples, who until the present were in the region of the shadow of death."

Another writer says of the humble discoverer: "Columbus claimed to be divinely appointed for his mission. He affirmed his voyage a miracle, and himself inspired with the conception of it by the Most Holy Trinity." (*History of Central America*, Vol. 1, p. 232.)

In a later correspondence to the Queen of Spain, Columbus explained the secret of his unquenchable yearning for an opportunity to venture upon the mighty ocean in an effort to discover a water route to the far East. He recorded: "An

(Concluded on page 628)



## A MAN OF DESTINY

(Continued from page 600)

angel appeared to me and said, 'God has given to thee, Columbus, the keys of the great chains that bind the oceans.'" (Montgomery, *History of America*, p. 138.)

Possessed of this same appraisal of Columbus, Orson Hyde said of him in a sermon in the Salt Lake Tabernacle, July 4, 1853: "... Observe Christopher Columbus in his silent meditations; mark his untiring and faithful observations! Behold him watching the western breeze, and marking, with zealous eye and anxious heart, every substance that floated on the ocean's eastward-bound current as probably from the New World he sought. Listen to the philosophy of his reasoning; that a western continent was necessary to preserve the equilibrium of the earth, and to balance it correctly on its own axis. Inspired of the Almighty God of heaven, he encountered the ridicule and jeer of a faithless and unbelieving world. . . . Combatting opposition, calumny and reproach from almost every quarter, he surmounted every obstacle, obtained an outfit that was as little fitting and proper for the great enterprise as was the manger for the birthplace of the Virgin's Son.

... The three old crazy vessels were enough. The Spirit Angel was their guardian and their guide, and was with them on the stormy deep. . . . Another important reason why this discovery should be made: The history and record of a fallen people, containing light from the spirit land, and truth from heaven, were buried in the soil of the western continent." (*Journal of Discourses*, Vol. 7:107.)

Orson Hyde further said of him: "By the aid of Ferdinand and Isabella of Spain he obtained three small vessels, old and almost rotten, poorly manned and badly provisioned. It was not because they believed he would be successful, but, like the unjust judge with the poor widow, they desired to get rid of his importunities. . . . If they had had any faith that he would be successful, they would have fitted him out with the best ships that any navies of the time could have afforded, manned with sufficient men and supplied with all the necessary equipments; and they would have said: 'Go and prosper, and the God of the seas pioneer your course.' But they had no faith in the enterprise; they wanted to stop his im-

portunings and get rid of him." (*Journal of Discourses*, 2:37.)

From Washington Irving's monumental work about Columbus we quote the following extract:

"In the latter part of his life, when, impressed with the sublime events brought about through his agency, Columbus looked back upon his career with a solemn and superstitious feeling, he attributed his early and irresistible inclination for the sea, and his passion for geographical studies, to an impulse from the Deity preparing him for the high decrees he was chosen to accomplish." (*Life and Voyages of Columbus*, by Irving, p. 18.)

It is not by chance that writers agree in their estimate of Columbus as a deeply religious man, a man of destiny. Of him Nephi, with foreseeing eye, testified that the Spirit of God "came down and wrought upon the man." The record of his life and the events of history confirm that testimony. And thus it appears that the Lord prepared this man to serve his own time and generation, as he has done many others, before and since, to further the purposes of God.

## THE CABLE

(Continued from page 599)

mail sack to the pulley at its upper end, let it slide down that slender wire, to be picked off by another carrier at the foot. He would exchange for the outgoing mail his own sack, bound for Kanab, to be hauled up the cable as the windlass gathered up the rope.

This way came the daily mail to Kanab.

Until a roadway should be built over the divide between Kanab and Marysvale, the cable would remain faithful to its work, greeting each new carrier as he came, bidding him farewell when the desperate loneliness of the upper trail drove him from the work.

THE novelty of the daily mail at Kanab had worn off. Sixty miles of riding over rough trail wore down man and beast. Winding a heavy load up a thousand-foot cable was a trying task. Traveling for two days through land where no man dwelt, where the only greeting word each day came from the rider on the opposite trail, made cheerless days. Men took the work, rode the

### BEE-HIVE ANSWERS

(See pages 625 and 626)

1. January, 1940.
  2. Daily Prayer—Service to children.
  3. Caddie Woodlawn—Good Manners.
  4. Yes. 5. Yes. 6. Yes. 7. Yes. 8. Yes. 9. Yes.
  10. Religion—Purple; 2. Home—Orange; 3. Health—Red; 4. Arts and Crafts—Brown; 5. Out-of-doors—Green; 6. Business—Gold; 7. Public Service—Red, White, and Blue.
  11. Yes.
  12. Twelve. 13. Worn during the earning of the rank.
  14. Complete the 3 Ranks, 14 Honor Badges, keep a record of the work in a Honey Comb.
  15. No.
1. True; 2. False; 3. False; 4. True; 5. False; 6. True; 7. True; 8. False; 9. True; 10. False.

trails for a few weeks, and turned to other tasks.

Nephi Johnson looked up from his desk to find before him one of his father's youngest boys, Aunt Margaret's second son. Tall for his

fourteen years, straight and slender as a young birch he stood, a little anxious but facing the older man unflinchingly. Clear, gray eyes, honest and unafraid, met the other's stern glance as the question snapped, "Why aren't you in school?"

"I guess you know the answer," the boy answered, mustering a rather tremulous smile. "Since Father died there has been mighty little school for me, or Joseph either. We've just had to keep at the farm work."

He hesitated a moment and then continued, "Mother and Joseph and the girls can manage the work at the farm now but we need some cash. I want to ride with the mail to Shunesburg Hill."

Whatever doubts the older man felt he left unexpressed. His father when nearing sixty had taken to wife a pretty girl of twenty years, the English Margaret. A hard life for all it was. The devoted father had gone on many missions and died an honored Patriarch. All his children were grown save only six of Margaret's family. The boy before him was her second son; four young children, one less than two years