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## Christopher Columbus and the Book of Mormon

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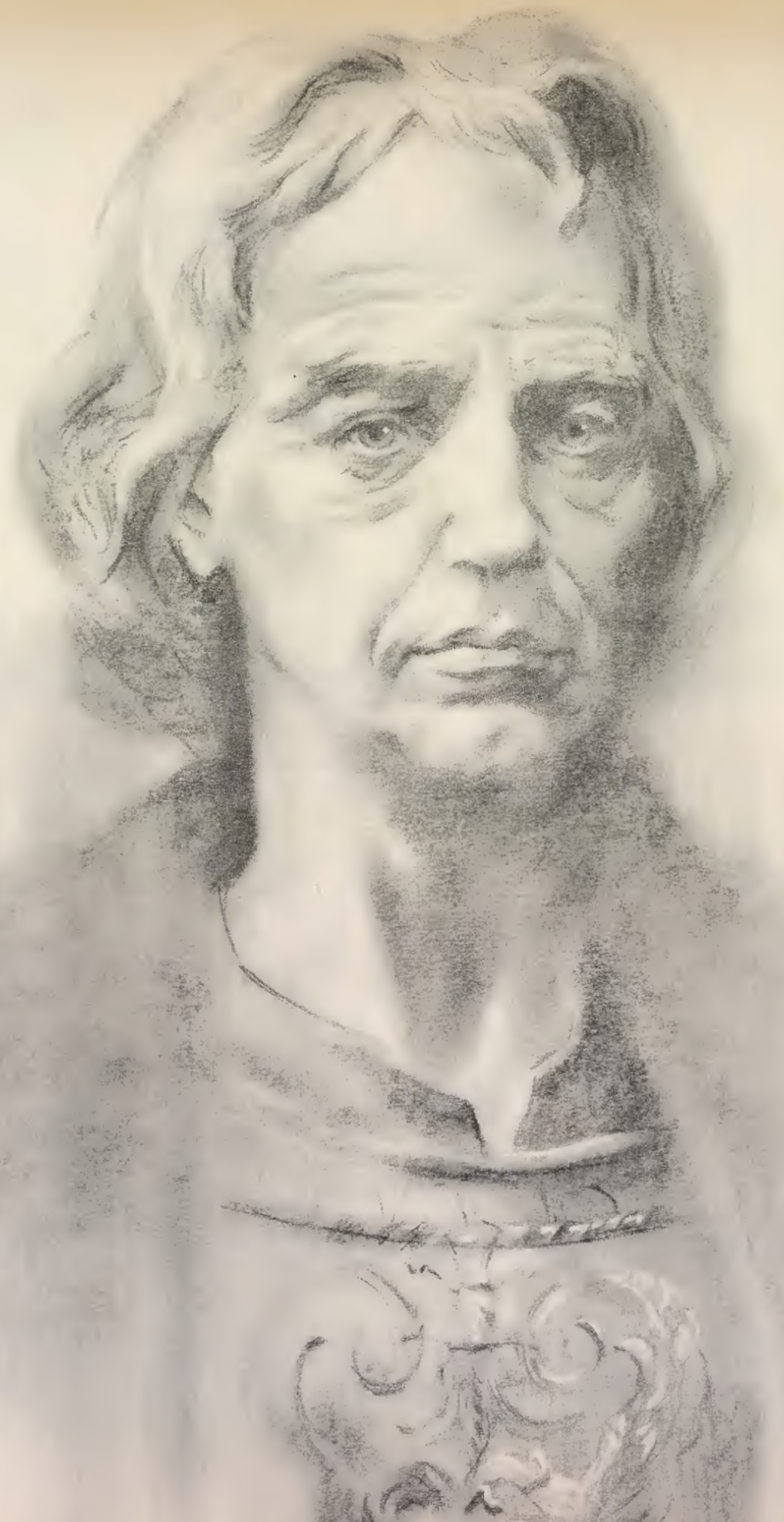
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**Abstract:** This article discusses Lehi's prophecy regarding "a man among the Gentiles" (Columbus) who would be "wrought upon" by the Holy Ghost and travel "forth upon many waters" (1 Nephi 13:12). The author presents evidence from Columbus's journals and letters that supports the claim that he was an inspired man who accomplished "a thing more divine than human to have found that way never before known to go to the east where the spices grow" (Sebastian Cabot).



# Christopher Columbus & The Book of Mormon

BY HYDE M. MERRILL

● Lehi, in one of his last addresses to his people, made the following important prophecy concerning the land of promise to which they had been led:

"Yea, the Lord hath covenanted this land unto me, and to my children forever, and also all those who should be led out of other countries by the hand of the Lord.

"Wherefore, I, Lehi, prophesy according to the workings of the Spirit which is in me, that *there shall none come into this land save they shall be brought by the hand of the Lord.* . . .

"And behold, it is wisdom that *this land should be kept as yet from the knowledge of other nations.* . . .

"Wherefore, I, Lehi, have obtained a promise, that inasmuch as those whom the Lord God shall bring out of the land of Jerusalem shall keep his commandments, . . . they shall be kept from all other nations, that they may possess this land unto themselves. . . .

"But behold, when the time cometh that they shall dwindle in unbelief, . . . behold, I say, if the day shall come that they will reject the Holy One of Israel, the true Messiah, their Redeemer and their God, behold, the judgments of him that is just shall rest upon them.

"Yea, *he will bring other nations unto them, and he will give unto them power, and he will take away from them the lands of their possessions.* . . ."<sup>1</sup>

Nephi had already seen the following vision regarding the fulfilling of the prophecy made by his father:

"And it came to pass that the angel said unto me: Behold the wrath of God is upon the seed of thy brethren.

"And I looked and beheld a man among the Gen-

tiles, 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."<sup>2</sup>

These prophecies mention several specific points: first, that the land now known as America would be protected by the Lord from interference from other nations until after the descendants of Lehi had rejected the true Messiah and had dwindled away in unbelief; second, that when the people had become unrighteous, the Lord would bring other nations, led specifically by "a man" on whom his Spirit would work; third, that he would give these gentiles power over the unrighteous Israelites, that he would take away from them the lands which heretofore had been theirs.

There is nothing earthshaking or new in stating that America has been discovered and Lehi's descendants subjugated. Were this my purpose I could pack up my typewriter and get back to by differential equations. But what these scriptures indicate, and what we accept, largely as a matter of faith, is that this was brought about directly by divine intervention. If we could produce evidence, encountered after the publishing of the Book of Mormon, indicating that such was the case, we would have another witness to the truthfulness of the Book of Mormon.

As a minor sidelight, before getting down to the meat of the question, let me quote the following which was attributed to Sebastian Cabot, contemporary of Columbus and himself a great explorer, as he comments on what people of the time felt about

Columbus' achievement in discovering America: Columbus' voyage ". . . was much discussed by everyone at the court of King Henry VII, who then reigned, saying that it was a thing more divine than human to have found that way never before known to go to the east where the spices grow."<sup>3</sup>

Thus at least one knowledgeable contemporary authority indicates that what Columbus accomplished was so difficult, by the standards of the times, as to be considered beyond the capabilities of a mere human being.

But in order to find out if Columbus really was "wrought upon by the Spirit of the Lord," let us learn a little more about him. He was a student of the Bible and was familiar with its contents as is evidenced by the frequent references to scripture that are found in his writings. However, in spite of his great religious faith, or perhaps because of it, he differed with the religious leaders of the day when they opposed his proposed trip to the Indies and his theory of the roundness of the earth on the basis of certain misinterpreted scriptures.

A very interesting and illuminating picture of the character of Christopher Columbus is afforded by a couple of paragraphs from a private, highly personal letter he wrote to his son Diego just before embarking on his fourth and last voyage to the New World:

"I command and charge you to be very devote in giving the tithes of all the moneys 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 command 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 the 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."<sup>4</sup>

The above selections are typical of the many that characterize Columbus' writings and demonstrate the deep testimony that he had of a personal, living God. Of course, this we would expect from a man who was inspired of God, but not necessarily from a man who wasn't. Remember that at the time the above was written, Columbus had fallen into great disfavor. He was financially in dire straits, and to insist this strongly that his son pay tithing at a time when they were practically penniless is indicative of the depth of his confidence in God.

The most interesting document, however, is a letter written by Columbus to the king and queen of Spain. During his fourth voyage, he was shipwrecked in the Caribbean and sent this letter to the nearest Spanish settlement by means of the Indians.

First of all, although he was theoretically Admiral of the Ocean Seas and Viceroy of the Indies, his ships were such deteriorated old hulks that it was practically suicide to try to take them out on the open ocean. He was also prohibited from making a landing at any Spanish settlements in the New World. He had no sooner crossed the ocean than there rose up a terrible tempest, lasting 88 days, which destroyed their sail and rigging and opened up leaks in their ships. His ship was so rotten and worm-eaten that with three pumps and pots and kettles, he could hardly keep it afloat. It was a miracle that they escaped with their lives. No sooner had this storm ceased than they were set upon by another which had them at its mercy for several weeks. They found harbor, but the natives were not friendly: many of the Spaniards were killed, and their position was made untenable. He managed to escape from the harbor with his ship, but his brother, in command of a second vessel, was left inside. Just at this awful moment another storm sprang up, and he found his life and the lives of his men and son, who had accompanied him, endangered from still another quarter. He was suffering from a severe fever and worn down (Continued on page 135)

## SUCCESS

BY HELEN KIMBALL ORGILL

*To hope and dream and wait—  
Again and still again;  
To face the changing hours,  
Aglow or numbed with pain,  
Unstinting of your powers;  
Then meet defeat, and once more,  
Still fighting midnight doubt,  
Work as you worked before,*

*Till by your will you climb,  
Yet keep the wished ideal  
Untarnished and unstained—  
So from the days you reap  
The seeds that have been sown;  
Serene you face the years,  
Dreams realized, your own,  
Aloof from fate or fears.*

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from fatigue. He said:

"All hope of escape was gone. I toiled up to the highest part of the ship, and, with a quivering voice and fast-falling tears, I called upon your Highnesses' war-captains from the points of the compass to come to my succor, but there was no reply. At length, groaning, I fell asleep, and heard a mild voice address me thus:—

"O fool, and slow to believe and to serve thy God, the God of all! What did He do more for Moses, or for David his servant, than He has done for thee? *From thine infancy He has kept thee under His constant and watchful care.* When He saw thee arrived at an age which suited His designs respecting thee, He brought wonderful renown to thy name throughout all the land. *He gave thee for thine own the Indies, which form so rich a portion of the world, and thou hast divided them as it pleased thee, for He gave thee power to do so. He gave thee also the keys of those barriers of the ocean sea which were closed with such mighty chains; and thou wast obeyed throughout many lands, and gained an honorable fame throughout Christendom.* What did the Most High do for the people of Israel, when He brought them out of Egypt? or for David, whom from a shepherd He made to be king in Judea? Turn to Him, and acknowledge thine error—His mercy is infinite. Thine old age shall not prevent thee from accomplishing any great undertaking. He holds under his sway many great inheritances. Abraham had exceeded a hundred years of age when he begat Isaac; nor was Sarah young. Thou criest out for uncertain help: answer, who has afflicted thee so much and so often, God or the world? The privileges promised by God, He never fails in bestowing; nor does He ever declare, after a service has been rendered Him, that such was not His intention, or that He had regarded the matter in another light; nor does He inflict suffering in order to make a show of His power. His acts conform to His words; and He fulfills all His promises with interest. Is this hard

usage: Thus I have told you what the Creator has done for thee, and what He does for all men. Even now He partially shows thee the reward of so many toils and dangers incurred by thee in the service of others.'

"I heard all this, as it were, in a trance; but I had no answer to give to such true words, and could but weep for my errors. He concluded speaking, whoever he was, saying, 'Fear not, but trust; all these

tribulations are written on marble stone, and not without cause.'"<sup>1</sup>

Isn't this fascinating? In his vision Christopher Columbus is being told some of the things that Lehi told his people 2,000 years before, which sermon was written on metal, and not without cause. First, he was told that the Lord gave him the "keys" to the barriers of the ocean, implying that before He did so, the barriers were locked. Correspondingly, in the words of Lehi,



## ALL ELSE BUT DEPENDABILITY

RICHARD L. EVANS

Before the death of Jacob, as recorded in the Genesis account, he blessed and counseled and characterized his sons, of one of whom he said: "Unstable as water, thou shalt not excel. . ."<sup>1</sup> In context there may be many meanings of this statement that could be considered, but in general it well could pertain to the character, the quality of dependability. "In any line of endeavor," observed a current source, "one trait of character that makes a man stand out from his fellows, is dependability. There are, of course, many who have little else than dependability to recommend them. Taken alone it could never elevate one very high . . . but, possessing all the other necessary attributes to . . . success and lacking dependability, he would never attain the heights that he otherwise might. . . . A leader who is not dependable will not keep his following for long. An executive expects dependability in his subordinates and he himself must have it in order to retain their respect."<sup>2</sup> In any relationship in life, in business, in marriage, in the home, in the pursuit of any profession, and even in the relationships of countries and communities, people need to know what they can count on. Laws and locks, contracts and commitments are still in some ways only as good as the dependability of the people who are parties to them. And the opportunities that are open are limitless for dependable, prepared young people, who have the character and the competence to see things through. And the greatest stumbling block to success and achievement and a solid position in life is an irresponsibility that cannot be counted on. Whatever else he has to offer—ability, talent, brilliance, skill—still no person is safe without dependability. No investment, no commitment, no contract is what it appears to be without knowing how a person will perform—without knowing that he will do *what* he says he will, *when* he says he will, to the best of his ability. Without this quality there is always unsatisfactory uncertainty. Without this quality no one can be counted on. Dependability is of greater worth than one can calculate. President McKay has often quoted a well-known Scottish writer who said: "To be trusted is a greater compliment than to be loved."<sup>3</sup> Without dependability there can be no trust. "Unstable as water, thou shalt not excel. . . ."

<sup>1</sup>Gen. 49:4.

<sup>2</sup>Roger Haglund, Rhode Island Governor's monthly letter, June 1965.

<sup>3</sup>George Macdonald, *Marquis of Lossie*, ch. 4.

"The Spoken Word," from Temple Square, presented over KSL and the Columbia Broadcasting System, November 28, 1965. Copyright 1965.

“. . . this land should be kept as yet from the knowledge of other nations. . . .” (2 Nephi 1:8.) Second, Columbus was told that the Lord had been preparing him with His constant and watchful care since infancy for his important role. Or as Nephi would say, the Spirit of God “. . . came down . . . and wrought upon the man. . . .”<sup>6</sup> Third, Columbus was informed that the Lord gave him power to divide the Indies as he saw fit. This compares with the Lord’s declaration that He would give power to other nations and would take away from Lehi’s descendants the lands of their possessions.<sup>7</sup>

The reference at the end of Columbus’ vision is interesting. The expression “marble stone” is a fairly common metaphor referring to a durable material. The statement is that his feats had already been written on “marble stone.” It is interesting that after Columbus died, his remains were buried in first one place and then another. An English traveler to Spain in the mid-1800’s, by which time the value of Columbus’ work was of course appreciated, after giving a description of the tombstone of a son of Columbus, where Columbus’ name and date of birth are also mentioned, says:

“Throughout all Spain I know of no other inscription to the memory of Columbus. At Valladolid, where he died, and where his body lay for some years, there is none that I could discover, neither is there any trace of any at the Cartuja, near Seville, to which his body was afterwards transferred, and in which his brother was buried.”

“It is a striking confirmation of the reproach of negligence, in regard to the memory of this great man, that in this solitary inscription in old Spain, the date of his death should be inaccurately given.”<sup>8</sup>

So, in the more than three hundred years after his death, in the country he served so valiantly, nothing in “marble stone” commemorated his tribulations. The only interpretation which makes sense is that the messenger told Columbus not only that he was able to accomplish what he did through the help of God, but that God had foretold his accomplishments and that this prophecy had been recorded in “durable material,” not without cause.

And what could be the cause? What could be the significance of the relationship between the Book of Mormon accounts and what Columbus was told in his vision?

The letter referring to the vision was written several hundred years before the publishing of the Book of Mormon. During that period it was published, to the best of my knowledge, three or four times in Spanish but was quite rare.

The earliest English translation of the letter to which I have found reference was made in London in 1847. It has been translated into English at least twice since then and published several times, but even today the fact of its existence is almost universally unknown. It appears that Joseph Smith and his contemporaries could certainly have had no knowledge of the existence of this account of Columbus.

Having, then, two completely independent accounts which record similar prophecies, the authenticity of both the vision of Columbus and the Book of Mormon account is strengthened. As discussed, each in its own characteristic wording acknowledges (1) the withholding of New World intervention from Europeans until an appointed time, (2) the assurance that divine influence prepared Columbus, and (3) the *power* by which the possessions of Lehi’s descendants were taken from them. To explain away these unusual parallels as being a case of borrowing one from the other, we have learned, is quite unlikely. Neither does a dismissal of the comparisons by saying that they are coincidental appear convincing. This leaves one other position: that both the Book of Mormon prophets—and consequently Joseph Smith—and Christopher Columbus obtained their knowledge by direct divine revelation.

#### FOOTNOTES

<sup>12</sup> Nephi 1:5-6, 8-11. Italics added.

<sup>21</sup> Nephi 13:11-12. Italics added.

<sup>3</sup>Ramusio, ed. Ven., 1550-53, i, f. 414; quoted in *The Journal of Christopher Columbus . . . et al.* (London: The Hakluyt Society, 1893), p. 213.

<sup>4</sup>*Colección de Documentos para la Historia de Costa Rica relativos al Cuarto y Ultimo Viaje de Cristóbal Colón*, trans. Hyde M. Merrill (San José, Costa Rica: Academia de Geografía e Historia de Costa Rica, 1952), p. 14.

<sup>5</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 25. Italics added.

<sup>6</sup>1 Nephi 13:12.

<sup>7</sup>2 Nephi 1:11.

<sup>8</sup>George Sumner, in *Select Letters of Columbus* (London: The Hakluyt Society, 1870), p. lxxxii.

## The Best Burnt Roast

(Continued from page 105)

So you wait; but what do you do when you can’t bear the pain of being alienated, yet feel the other should say, ‘I’m sorry,’ and ease the pressure?”

Let us look again at Jesus’ answer—“. . . whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them. . . .” (Matt. 7:12.) Or, as one wise woman answered the question, “Why wait? Go and say you’re sorry, and get on with things.” Unfortunately, some people find it exceedingly difficult to say, “I’m sorry,” or to take the lead in untangling emotional situations. At such times they ask for an appreciation of their position, for empathy with their problem of living with themselves. One’s sense of justice and fair play can become a thorn at such times, hindering good relationships. One would not advise any partner to spend forever in a living hell.

There are, however, many trials of faith and mercy which can be made before one gives up. One cannot have any increase in happiness and joy unless he is willing to risk or give up a current pattern which brings him some satisfaction. If the partner finds the going rough, perhaps a new trial on my part can help both of us. Unwillingness to try leaves us tied to current patterns of satisfactions which are always limited. Eternal growth will always consist of our striving to open up new areas of understanding and the beauty therein.

While teaching at a leading Eastern university, I had in class a married woman with one child. She described her five-year marriage as being, to that point, a dog-and-cat relationship with plenty of fur flying. She had lived as though she had no need for any man. As a result, her husband felt no sense of appreciation and treated her in a tyrannical fashion. At the time I met them, they were close to separation. She felt he was putting pressure on her and she had to defend herself. Hence, meals were never on time, details were overlooked, the house was a mess.

One day she decided just maybe she was putting pressure on him. So she decided she’d try letting up just a little by doing something he liked. One evening she prepared