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The Faith of Christ

by Mary Lee Treat

All the Book of Mormon prophets before the time of Christ testified of his coming and exercised faith in him.

Prophecies of Christ's Coming

Nephi saw the birth of the Savior in vision while he was still in the Old World:

... the angel spake unto me saying,
"Look!"
And I looked and beheld the virgin
again, bearing a child in her arms.
And the angel said unto me, "Behold,
the Lamb of God, yea, even the
Eternal Father!" 1 Nephi 3:60-62

Jacob, son of Lehi, told Sherem, an antichrist, that "none of the prophets have written nor prophesied, save they have spoken concerning this Christ."

More than 400 years later another angel proclaimed "the glad tidings of great joy" to King Benjamin which he then shared with his people in the land of Zarahemla:

For behold, the time cometh and is
not far distant, that with power
the Lord Omnipotent who
reigneth, who was and is from all
eternity to all eternity,
Shall come down from heaven among
the children of men and shall
dwell in a tabernacle of clay. . .
And he shall be called Jesus Christ,
the Son of God,
The Father of heaven and earth,

The Creator of all things from the
beginning;
And his mother shall be called Mary.
Mosiah 1:97, 102

Two generations later Alma, the son of Alma, gave a prophetic word to the people in Gideon about the coming of Christ:

And behold, he shall be born of Mary
at Jerusalem, which is the land of
our forefathers,
She being a virgin, a precious and
chosen vessel who shall be
overshadowed and conceive by
the power of the Holy Ghost and
bring forth a son,
Yea, even the Son of God. Alma 5:19

When we consider how plainly their scriptures prophesied that Jesus the Messiah would come and where and when he would be born, we realize that this knowledge is one of the "plain and precious things" missing from the Bible (with the exception of Isaiah's prophecy in chapter 53).

Faith in Christ's Coming

The phrases "faith of Christ" or "faith in Christ" are significant in the Book of Mormon. They tell us that those people who believed the words of the prophets, written or spoken, looked forward to the coming of Jesus Christ, in the flesh.

However, it is important to remember that throughout the 600

years before Christ's birth, believers who had a "faith in Christ" were persecuted. Abinadi was burned at the stake by King Noah for his testimony. Nevertheless his testimony bore fruit in the lives of Alma (a priest in Noah's court) and the many people he converted.

Around 30 B.C. when Alma's grandson, Helaman II, was the righteous leader of the Nephites, there was a time of great tribulation for the believers. In the midst of great tribulation however, there was also unprecedented prosperity for the church as tens of thousands were converted. Mormon, the abridger and narrator of the story, tells us that the believers "did wax stronger and stronger . . . in the faith of Christ" (Helaman 2:31).

What Mormon is telling us is that these believers grew stronger and stronger in their faith of Christ's coming just as the prophets had prophesied.

A Type

Is there not a type or lesson to be learned from the faith of all these believers in the word of God? Today we have another promise that Christ will return and fulfill all the covenants he made to the house of Israel. Our faith, like that of the people in the Book of Mormon, is in the literal fulfillment of God's word to all his prophets from the beginning of time.

We should expect our faith in the

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... that they (the remnant of the house of Israel) may know the covenants of the Lord . . .

Christopher Columbus: Man of Vision and Faith

Part II

by Shirley R. Heater



The first of this two-part article introduced a new perspective of the man credited with discovering the New World—Christopher Columbus. These new insights come from Columbus's *Book of Prophecies*, a collection of prophecies and commentary which he compiled to show that he was fulfilling God's plan. We saw specific confirmation from the Book of Mormon that the discovery was a direct fulfillment of prophecy. It was God's plan and timing to bring the Old and New Worlds together.

We will continue exploring themes in Columbus's writings (including the prophecies of Isaiah, isles of the sea, and the restoration of the lost tribes of Israel) which have meaning for Book of Mormon believers.

Isaiah and the Isles of the Sea

Columbus and Nephi had special regard for Isaiah—the Old Testament prophet most often quoted or referred to in both Columbus's *Book of Prophecies* and the Book of Mormon. More intriguing is the fact that Nephi and Columbus selected the same portions of Isaiah and that each saw himself fulfilling those prophecies.

One passage—Isaiah 11:10-12—stands out above the rest (verse 11 is found three times in the Book of Mormon and twice in Columbus's writings). These three verses summarize the primary subjects of all the selected Isaiah passages: the Lord will set his hand a second time to recover or redeem the remnant of his people from the islands of the sea, set up a standard or ensign and restore the house of Israel.

Our conclusion is that Nephi and Columbus were looking at "both sides of the same coin": one (the

Book of Mormon peoples on the "isles of the sea" who "dwindled in unbelief") as those who will be restored, and the other (Columbus) as an instrument used by God to play a role in bringing about the restoration of his people.

The Book of Mormon identifies the seed of Lehi as a remnant, a branch broken off which will be restored to the knowledge of their covenant and their Redeemer (e.g., 1 Nephi 4:15-17). Nephi and his brother, Jacob, are the only Book of Mormon writers who crossed the ocean, and they uniquely view their promised land as an island. Nephi, who delighted in the words of Isaiah (2 Nephi 11:8), "likened" them to his people (2 Nephi 8:3) in their literal fulfillment.

The "islands of the sea" theme ranks as one of Columbus's most-often mentioned subjects, not only in Isaiah but in many other scriptures and commentary which he compiled. Columbus saw himself as having a servant's role in fulfilling these key prophecies. He wrote, "... for the execution of the journey to the Indies I was not aided by intelligence, by mathematics or by maps. It was simply the fulfillment of what Isaiah had prophesied" (West and Kling 1991:111; Brigham 1991:182).

He said, "Our Lord made me the messenger of the new heaven and the new earth, of which he spoke in the Book of Revelation by St. John, after having spoken of it by the mouth of Isaiah; and he showed me the place where to find it" (Brigham 1990:50).

When Columbus was led to the "isles of the sea," the door was opened to the lands occupied by the remnant of the Book of Mormon people. This set events in motion for the eventual restoration of the knowledge of the covenants.

Lost Tribes and Other Sheep

Through Columbus's writings, it is obvious that he fully expected to find the lost tribes of Israel (Wiesenthal 1973:61). He saw himself as "Christ-bearer" (the meaning of his name Christopher), God's messenger to bring a knowledge of the Savior to the lost tribes and ultimately to the world as part of God's grand scheme of "the final conversion of all races" (Watts 1985:93).

Columbus makes many references to the scattering and gathering of the house of Israel and the promised land. He desired to assist Jerusalem in regaining her freedom and in restoring the temple, and he personally identified with the writings of Abbot Joachim who "taught that . . . there would be . . . an age of restoration and renewal for the kingdom of Christ" and that "the restorer of the House of Mt. Zion would come out of Spain" (West and Kling 1991:111, 261, note 14).

Particularly noteworthy is Columbus's inclusion of John 10:16 in his *Book of Prophecies*: "I have other sheep that are not of this sheep pen [fold], and I must bring them also; they will hear my voice, and there shall be one flock and one shepherd" (Brigham 1991:264-265). It is with great foresight that he believed that the "flock" would not just be "Israel after the flesh" but that a "spiritual Israel" would be formed of all who would come to Christ (208-209).

The Book of Mormon addresses the concept of a "spiritual Israel." It teaches that "[t]he restoration of the house of Israel is probably the best scriptural term to describe God's plan for the last days" and that "the restoration of the house of Israel involved all the tribes of Israel and not just one or two" (Treat 1992:52-

53). All those who accept Christ, whether literal descendants or adopted, are the house of Israel.

When Jesus visited Lehi's descendants, he told them that they were the other sheep of which he had spoken and that he had still other sheep (3 Nephi 7:20, 24-26). He also told them that those Gentiles who repented would also be numbered among his people (v. 37). There are specific promises in the Book of Mormon to restore the Lamanites to "the knowledge of their Redeemer, . . . and be numbered among his sheep" which are yet to be fulfilled (Helaman 5:104). This restoration was set in motion when Columbus was led to the New World, followed by Gentiles who brought the "record of the Jews" (1 Nephi 3:155-161). It will culminate when they receive the Book of Mormon and the two books "grow together" (2 Nephi 2:17-23).

The Jewish Connection

Was Columbus Jewish? There are several proponents of Columbus's Jewish heritage, with varying viewpoints. Some believe "[t]hat there is abundant circumstantial evidence that Columbus was of a Jewish background, at least on one side of the family" (Fusan 1987:16). The description of Columbus in the Book of Mormon as "a man among the Gentiles" could be interpreted either as a Jew or a Gentile (1 Nephi 3:145).

Columbus is seen either as a *converso*, a converted Jew (Madariaga 1949:54-65, 119-135), or a *marrano*, a professing Christian who was still a secretly-practicing Jew (Wiesenthal 1973:124-133). Whether or not he was of Jewish ancestry—an interesting proposition—Columbus's writings are abundantly interwoven with professions of faith and belief in Jesus Christ as his Savior (Brigham 1991:179-181), and he affirms his faith in a letter to the king and queen of Spain (182-183):

I am the worst of sinners. The pity and mercy of our Lord have completely covered me whenever I

have called [on him] for them. I found the sweetest consolation in casting away all my anxiety, so as to contemplate his marvelous presence.

Columbus's mission was permeated with a "Jewish flavor." Many Jews supported his venture, providing maps, instruments and finances. Many crew members are believed to have been Jewish. In anticipation of finding the lost tribes on his first voyage, Columbus took along a *converso*, Luis de Torres, an experienced interpreter who "knew how to speak Hebrew, Chaldean, and even some Arabic" (Fusan 1987:100-101). Upon arrival in the New World, Hebrew was probably spoken in an attempt to communicate with the natives.

In the log of his first voyage, Columbus linked the beginning of his voyage to America (early morning of August 3rd) and the expulsion of all professing Jews from Spain (effective at midnight of August 2nd) (Fusan 1987:52). The Jewish people were hopeful of finding a new place of refuge (Wiesenthal 1973:88). The New World was to become a haven for Jews and a new promised land. In fact, the first refugees came in the late fifteenth century; many were *marranos* (Sachar 1992:10).

Columbus also desired to free Jerusalem from the Muslims and restore the Holy Land to the Church. This could only be financed by discovering new lands and gathering enough gold, silver and precious stones (Fusan 1987:34). However, he knew that his desire to bring freedom to the people of the Old Testament could ultimately come only through their conversion to Jesus Christ.

The Last Days

Columbus believed that he was living in the last days. He calculated that "there are but 155 years left for the fulfillment of the seven thousand [years from creation] . . . at which time . . . the world will come to an end. Our Savior said that before the consummation of this world, all that

was written by the Prophets must be fulfilled" (Brigham 1991:181).

Although he felt most prophecies had already been fulfilled, those that "remained yet to be fulfilled . . . are great events for the world" (West and Kling 1991:111). He believed that one particular prophecy which was essential before the return of Christ applied to himself and his experience, that of taking the gospel to the ends of the earth. He wrote, "I believe that there is evidence that our Lord is hastening these things. This evidence is the fact that the Gospel must now be proclaimed to so many lands in such a short time" (West and Kling 1991:111).

Writing in retrospect of his discovery, he said, ". . . the sign which convinces me that our Lord is hastening the end of the world is the preaching of the Gospel recently in so many lands" (Brigham 1991:183).

Mission Accomplished!

Nephi recorded more than two thousand years before Columbus that the "man among the Gentiles" would be led by the Holy Spirit and that knowledge of the New World would be kept from other nations until the people had "dwindled in unbelief." The Book of Mormon has sharpened our understanding of the restoring of the house of Israel in these latter days. We observe that this is precisely the purpose Columbus saw as his calling, to assist in this great enterprise. It should not be surprising that Nephi and Columbus quote the same scriptures.

Columbus's grasp of scripture was far beyond the knowledge of the average person of his day; most "laymen" did not even read scripture. He portrayed his vision and mission as ushering in a final gathering of the "Jews" or lost tribes just prior to the return of Christ.

In the scheme of things, his vision was remarkably accurate. In light of the purpose of the Book of Mormon and the future prophecies to be fulfilled, he unquestionably was an instrument in the hands of God, an essential link in the chain of events

which are even now setting the stage for the final end-time prophecies to be fulfilled.

A significant link in the more-recent past occurred with the coming forth of the Book of Mormon.

Among the scriptures quoted to young Joseph Smith by the angel Moroni were the eleventh chapter of Isaiah (found in Columbus's writings and in Second Nephi) and Joel 2:28-32, which Columbus also included in his *Book of Prophecies*.

At a recent archaeology conference in Austin, Texas, a native Maya linguist shared the heart-cry of her people for cultural liberty and political rights. Real liberty will occur when they are finally restored to a knowledge of their Redeemer and their fathers as part of the house of Israel. When this occurs, we can truly say of Christopher Columbus: "Mission Accomplished."^{ZRF}

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word of God to be tested just as the faith of those who believed in his first coming was tested. Some may be called upon, as was Abinadi, to give their lives. Others, as were Lehi, Mosiah and Alma, may be called upon to leave their homes and gather to a new land.

Like the church in Helaman's day, we need to grow "firmer and firmer in the faith of [the second coming of] Christ." Those who believed the prophecy of Samuel the Lamanite about the sign of the birth of Christ were threatened with death if the sign did not appear. As Nephi prayed for those believers, the Lord gave him words of comfort and hope that still bring assurance to us today as we look for the Savior's return:

And on the morrow come I into the world,
To show unto the world that I will fulfill all that which I have caused to be spoken by the mouth of my holy prophets. 3 Nephi 1:13

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