



"I believe the will of God prevails; without Him I cannot succeed; with His assistance I cannot fail."

—Abraham Lincoln

**22-Feb-02**

## *BC (Before Columbus)*

The March 2002 *The Atlantic Monthly* contains an interesting cover article by Charles C. Mann titled "1491." In it, Mann chronicles the often-bitter conflict among scholars over the condition of America and its indigenous peoples before "Columbus sailed the ocean blue." The teaser for the article is intriguing: "America before Columbus was more sophisticated and more populous than we ever thought—and a more livable place than Europe." It took me only a few seconds to thumb to page 41 and begin reading.

The last generation or two of American scholarship has been greatly influenced by the "noble savage" myth, that is, the fiction that non-European, indigenous peoples are less destructive of their environments, more attuned to nature, and fundamentally better, more ethical people. This patent falsehood has spawned, among other liberal movements, radical environmentalism, which places nature above humanity. (For an in-depth discussion of this myth, see *Plagues of the Mind: The New Epidemic of False Knowledge* by Bruce S. Thornton, ISI Books, 1999.) Recent findings, however, have begun to expose the assumptions and outright lies it contains.

Mann's article adds to the evidence. For instance, some scholars postulate that as many as 112 million people lived in the Americas before 1492, destroying the assumption that the continents were sparsely populated and its peoples primarily hunter-gatherers. By the time colonies began to be set up, though, the native populations had already begun to dwindle due to exposure to infectious diseases brought from Europe. Anthropologist Henry F. Dobyns estimates that 95% of natives died in the first 130 years of contact between Europe and America.

For instance, when in the early 1540s Hernando de Soto explored what is now eastern Arkansas just south of Memphis, Tennessee, he found the area densely populated with about fifty large towns. Yet, when Rene La Salle came through the same area in 1682, it was deserted. He saw no Indian villages for 200 miles.

Similar depopulations occurred in southern coastal Maine and at Cape Cod after exposure to British and French explorers. When the Mayflower landed at Cape Cod and a month later at Plymouth in 1620, all the colonists found were deserted villages. Throughout the surrounding woodlands, they found Indians "on heapes [sic], as they lay in their houses," Thomas Morton, an English trader, wrote. The bones and skulls lying about caused him to call these woods "a new found Golgotha."

Unlike Morton, these things reminded me of God's promise to Israel in [Exodus 23:27-30](#):

I will send My fear before you, I will cause confusion among all the people to whom you come, and will make all your enemies turn their backs to you. And I will send hornets before you, which shall drive out the Hivite, the Canaanite, and the Hittite from before you. I will not drive them out from before you in one year, lest the land become desolate and the beast of the field become too numerous for you. Little by little I will drive them out from before you, until you have increased, and you inherit the land.

To those who believe that Americans are descended from Manasseh, son of Joseph, what is the colonization of this country but the fulfillment of God's promise to give Abraham's descendants their birthright ([Genesis 22:16-18](#); [27:27-29](#))? The depopulation of native peoples by disease then becomes a means [God](#) used to prepare the way for Manasseh's slow but steady migration to these shores and thence to the Pacific coast.

That such a disaster occurred to move God's plan forward does not make it any less tragic. But God's sovereignty is absolute, and He keeps all His promises. He says to Joseph through [Jacob](#), "[Manasseh] also shall become a people, and he also shall be great" ([Genesis 48:19](#)). In [Genesis 49:25](#), he prophesies, "[T]he God of your father . . . will help you, and . . . the Almighty . . . will bless you with blessings of heaven above, blessings of the deep that lies beneath, blessings of the breasts and of the womb." Later, he says, "For Jacob My servant's sake, and Israel My elect, . . . I make [peace](#) and create calamity; I, the LORD do all these things" ([Isaiah 45:4](#), 7).

Although it is a minor point of history—and still somewhat disputed in its scope—this act

CGG Weekly: BC (Before Columbus) (22-Feb-02)

of God nevertheless paved the way for America, for the spread of [the gospel](#) around [the world](#), and eventually for the [return of Christ](#) and the establishment of the [Kingdom of God](#). How can we doubt "that the Most High rules in the kingdom of men, [and] gives it to whomever He will" ([Daniel 4:17](#))?

- Richard T. Ritenbaugh

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## *From the Archives: Featured Sermon*

### [Joseph: A Saga of Excellence \(Part One\)](#)

by John W. Ritenbaugh

John Ritenbaugh concludes that of all the biblical patriarchs, Joseph receives the least criticism and the most approbation, a sterling record of character and human accomplishment surpassed only by Jesus Christ. Considering the the competitive, polygamous family structure into which he was born, it was truly a miracle he turned out so well. A major factor in Joseph's integrity was the receiving of Jacob's distilled wisdom after the death of Rachel, a time when Jacob, in his grief and reflection, transferred his affection to Joseph, spending quality time with him, teaching about his experiences (both disappointments and successes) at overcoming and growing.

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## *From the Archives: Featured Article*

### [Israel: Past](#)

by Richard T. Ritenbaugh

The history of Israel is not only a fascinating study, but it also reveals important facts and principles necessary for proper understanding of prophecy. Once Isreal is identified prophetically, Bible prophecy opens up and God's plan becomes plain!

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