

America's Fate and Ultimate Destiny

MARION G. ROMNEY

This year being our nation's Bicentennial anniversary and the Fourth of July being but two months away, I have thought it might be appropriate to give some consideration to our country's fate and her ultimate destiny.

Celebration of the Fourth of July

Although I was born and lived for fifteen years in a foreign land, my parents, who were United States citizens, and their fellow colonists always remembered and observed the Fourth of July. The celebration regularly included a flag and bunting parade and an oration commemorating the signing of the Declaration of Independence.

My concept of, and my feelings about, what was going on in and around Independence Hall at the time the Declaration was being signed, were in my youth and still are influenced by the words and the spirit of the poem "Independence Bell." I memorized it in my youth, and I hope its lines will transmit to you something of my feelings as I read them to you now.

*There was tumult in the city,
In the quaint Old Quaker town,
And the streets were rife with people
Pacing restless up and down.—
People gathering at corners,*

*Where they whispered each to each,
And the sweat stood on their temples
With the earnestness of speech.*

*As the bleak Atlantic currents
Lash the wild Newfoundland shore,
So they beat against the State House,
So they surged against the door;
And the mingling of their voices
Made a harmony profound,
Till the quiet street of Chestnut
Was all turbulent with sound.*

*"Will they do it?" "Dare they do it?"
"Who is speaking?" "What's the news?"
"What of Adams?" "What of Sherman?"
"Oh, God grant they won't refuse!"
"Make some way, there!" "Let me nearer!"
"I am stifling!" "Stifle, then!
When a nation's life's at hazard,
We've no time to think of men!"*

*So they beat against the portal,
Man and woman, maid and child;*

Marion G. Romney was second counselor in the First Presidency of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints when this fireside address was given at Brigham Young University on 2 May 1976.

*And the July sun in heaven
On the scene looked down and smiled:
The same sun that saw the Spartan
Shed his patriot blood in vain,
Now beheld the soul of freedom,
All unconquered, rise again.*

*See! See! The dense crowd quivers
Through all its lengthy line,
As the boy beside the portal
Looks forth to give the sign!
With his little hands uplifted,
Breezes dallying with his hair,
Hark! with deep, clear intonation,
Breaks his young voice on the air.*

*Hushed the people's swelling murmur,
List the boy's exultant cry!
"Ring!" he shouts, "Ring! Grandpa,
Ring! oh, ring for Liberty!"
Quickly at the given signal
The bell-man lifts his hand,
Forth he sends the good news, making
Iron music through the land.*

*How they shouted! What rejoicing!
How the old bell shook the air,
Till the clang of freedom ruffled
The calmly gliding Delaware!
How the bonfires and the torches
Lighted up the night's repose,
And from the flames, like fabled Phoenix,
Our glorious Liberty arose!*

*That old State House bell is silent,
Hushed is now its clamorous tongue;
But the spirit it awakened
Still is living—ever young;
And when we greet the smiling sunlight
On the Fourth of each July,
We will ne'er forget the bell-man
Who, betwixt the earth and sky,
Rung out, loudly, "INDEPENDENCE";
Which, please God, shall never die!*

[Anonymous, in Robert Haven Shauffler, *Independence Day* (New York: Dodd, Mead and Company, 1924), pp. 112–14]

I hope each of you, and I, have like feelings about this great land of America, about the Declaration of Independence, and about the Constitution of the United States.

Sacred History of America

In God's economy, America is now and has always been a choice and favored land. God has decreed for her a final, great, and glorious destiny. Here Zion is to be established and the New Jerusalem is to be built. From here the law of God shall go forth to all nations.

America received her first consecration as a favored land when the Lord planted here the Garden of Eden as a habitation for Adam and Eve.

A thousand years later Enoch's Zion flourished here.

And then some six hundred years thereafter this land was deluged by the Flood and left uninhabited, so far as human beings were concerned, until the Lord led to this land from the tower of Babel a colony of people, the Jaredites, declaring as he led them that he was bringing them to a "land of promise, . . . choice above all other lands," and "that whoso should possess this land . . . from that time henceforth and forever, should serve him, the true and only God, or they should be swept off when the fulness of his wrath should come upon them" (Ether 2:7–8).

Here in this land these people, the Jaredites, built a nation of which the Lord said, "There shall be none greater . . . upon . . . the face of the earth" (Ether 1:43). They dwelt here for some two thousand years. Finally, however, they ripened in iniquity and were, pursuant to God's decree, swept off the land in a fratricidal war.

Six hundred years B.C., as time was running out for the Jaredites, the Lord brought to this

land Lehi and his colony. Before they arrived here the Lord said to them, as he had said to the Jaredites, “Inasmuch as ye shall keep my commandments, ye shall prosper, and shall be led to a land of promise; yea, even a land which I have prepared for you; yea, a land which is choice above all other lands” (1 Nephi 2:20). Simultaneously he warned them that if they did not serve him, they would not prosper in the land but would be cut off from his presence.

The Book of Mormon record testifies to the fact that, when they obeyed the laws of God, they prospered, and that when they did not obey them, they were cut off from the presence of God. Finally the Nephite branch of those people, having ripened in iniquity, was destroyed by the Lamanites, who, under the curse of “their unbelief and idolatry,” were scattered and became the people discovered by Columbus when he was led here in 1492 (see Mormon 5:15).

You, of course, know that the facts I have just recited are not to be found in profane history books. Nowhere in all secular history is mention made of America before Columbus. Why? Because this land has been from the beginning reserved by the Lord for those whom he himself would lead here. This we learn from the ancient prophet Lehi.

I . . . 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.

Wherefore, this land is consecrated unto him whom he shall bring. And if it so be that they shall serve him according to the commandments which he hath given, it shall be a land of liberty unto them; wherefore, they shall never be brought down into captivity; if so, it shall be because of iniquity; for if iniquity shall abound cursed shall be the land for their sakes, but unto the righteous it shall be blessed forever.

And behold, it is wisdom that this land should be kept as yet from the knowledge of other nations; for . . . many nations would overrun the land. . . .

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 prosper upon the face of this land; and they shall be kept from all other nations, that they may possess this land unto themselves. And if it so be that they shall keep his commandments they shall be blessed upon the face of this land, and there shall be none to molest them, nor to take away the land of their inheritance; and they shall dwell safely forever. [2 Nephi 1:6–9; emphasis added]

This promise Lehi received for his own descendants and for the Mulekites who also came from Jerusalem. (Mulek was the son of Zedekiah—Mosiah 25:2; Helaman 6:10; 9:21.) He followed it, however, with this solemn warning and prophecy:

Behold, I say, if the day shall come that they [the people who came out from Jerusalem who were the Nephites and the ones who came at the time of the Mulekites] 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 descendants of the people who came from Jerusalem] the lands of their possessions [that is, the new nations will take away from them], and he will cause them to be scattered and smitten. [2 Nephi 1:10–11]

This remarkable prophecy not only explains why America was to be discovered only by those whom God should lead here; it also foreshadows the forfeiting by Lehi’s descendants of their inheritance and the coming of other nations.

History records that these “other nations” were introduced to this land by Columbus, of whose coming ancient American seers prophesied. As early as 590 B.C., before Lehi made the foregoing prophecy, his son Nephi was given to see in vision Columbus being led by the “Spirit of God” to this promised land. Nephi thus described his vision:

And I beheld the Spirit of God [before he had ever reached the promised land], 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.

And it came to pass that I beheld the Spirit of God, that it wrought upon other Gentiles; and they went forth out of captivity, upon the many waters.

And it came to pass that I beheld many multitudes of the Gentiles upon the land of promise [among them the Puritans in New England, the Quakers in Pennsylvania, the Catholics in Maryland, the Huguenots in Virginia and the Carolinas, and the Lutherans in Georgia]; and I beheld the wrath of God, that it was upon the seed of my brethren; and they were scattered before the Gentiles and were smitten. [1 Nephi 13:12–14]

Everyone acquainted with colonial and U.S. history knows how the American Indians were scattered and smitten by the Gentiles who came here following Columbus.

Nephi then saw and thus described our colonial history.

And I beheld the Spirit of the Lord, that it was upon the Gentiles, and they did prosper and obtain the land for their inheritance [that is, the inheritance of the seed of his brethren who had been scattered]. . . .

And it came to pass that I, Nephi, beheld that the Gentiles who had gone forth out of captivity did humble themselves before the Lord; and the power of the Lord was with them [the thirteen original colonies].

And I beheld that their mother Gentiles were gathered together upon the waters, and upon the land also, to battle against them [in the American Revolutionary War].

And I beheld that the power of God was with them, and also that the wrath of God was upon all those that were gathered together against them to battle.

And I, Nephi, beheld that the Gentiles that had gone out of captivity were delivered by the power of God out of the hands of all other nations. [1 Nephi 13:15–19]

We know why the colonies were able to win freedom in the Revolutionary War.

Columbus, of course, knew nothing about this record of Nephi’s vision. Nevertheless, he corroborates it. He put on record his convictions that he was divinely led to America. Elder Nephi L. Morris supports this conclusion with quotes from Washington Irving’s *The Life and Voyages of Christopher Columbus*:

“In the latter part of his life, Columbus, when impressed with the sublime events brought about by his agency . . . 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” (See Irving, p. 18, vol. 1).

“When [Columbus] had formed his theory, it became fixed in his mind with singular firmness, and influenced his entire character and conduct. He never spoke in doubt or hesitation, but with as [such] certainty as if his eyes had beheld the promised land. No trial or disappointment could divert him from the steady pursuit of his object. A deep religious sentiment mingled with his meditations, and gave him at times a tinge of superstition, but it was of a sublime and lofty kind; he looked upon himself as standing in the hand of heaven, chosen from among men for the accomplishment of his high purpose. . . .”

In the royal presence of Isabella, Irving [his biographer] says "He unfolded his plans with eloquence and zeal for he felt himself, as he afterwards declared, kindled as with a fire from on high, and considered himself the agent chosen of heaven to accomplish the grand design . . ."

His son Fernando, in the biography of his father quotes him as saying on one occasion: "God gave me the faith and afterwards the courage so that I was quite willing to undertake the journey."

And the will of Columbus reads thus:

*"In the name of the most holy trinity, who inspired me with the idea and afterwards made it perfectly clear to me that I could navigate and go to the Indies from Spain, by traversing the ocean westward." [Nephi Lowell Morris, "Columbus and the Book of Mormon," an address delivered over KSL Radio, Sunday, 1 July 1928, and printed in the *Deseret News*, Saturday, 7 July 1928, section 3, p. VI]*

America Reserved for the Righteous

We who live in America today are here because the Lord led Columbus to this land. We dwell here under the same divine decree, however, as did the ancient civilizations, who, being likewise led here, prospered when they obeyed the laws of the God of the land but who finally ripened in iniquity and, pursuant to the Lord's decree, were swept off the land. And be it known that we are as well informed of the decree as were those former inhabitants. The manner in which a knowledge of this decree came to us is as follows:

Moroni, an American prophet-historian who, about 421 A.D., closed the sacred Book of Mormon record now available to us, spent his youth and middle life in the final struggle between his people, the Nephites, and the Lamanites. As the sole surviving Nephite, he spent the rest of his life abridging the two-thousand-year record of the Jaredites. He was therefore familiar with all the lurid details of their demise. With these heartrending scenes and his own experiences upon his mind, he

was given in vision a view of us who now dwell here. Knowing that his record would come to us, he wrote as he looked at us in vision:

Behold, I speak unto you as if ye were present, and yet ye are not. But behold, Jesus Christ hath shown you unto me, and I know your doing. [Mormon 8:35]

And this [the record that he wrote] cometh unto you . . . that ye may know the decrees of God—that ye may repent, and not continue in your iniquities until the fulness come, that ye may not bring down the fulness of the wrath of God upon you as the inhabitants of the land have hitherto done.

Behold, this is a choice land, and whatsoever nation shall possess it shall be free from bondage, and from captivity, and from all other nations under heaven, if they will but serve the God of the land, who is Jesus Christ. [Ether 2:11–12; emphasis added]

Although the foregoing references to America's past are brief and sketchy, they clearly show that she is now and has been from the beginning a favored and choice land in which the Lord has taken a personal and peculiar interest. They make it crystal clear that if destruction or subjugation shall come to us, it will not be by a foreign foe but because we, the inhabitants of the land, shall have reached a "fulness of iniquity" (see J. Reuben Clark, Jr., *Stand Fast by Our Constitution* [Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Company, 1973], p. 183).

But not only has the Almighty reserved America for a righteous people and decreed that her inhabitants shall serve him or be swept off the land; he has also, as indicated at the outset of these remarks, decreed for her a great and marvelous final destiny—namely, that out of her is to go forth to all the world his law.

Isaiah so declared centuries ago when he prophesied:

It shall come to pass in the last days, that the mountain of the Lord's house shall be established in the top of the mountains, and shall be exalted above the hills; and all nations shall flow unto it.

And many people shall go and say, . . . let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, to the house of the God of Jacob; and he will teach us of his ways, and we will walk in his paths: for out of Zion shall go forth the law, and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem. [Isaiah 2:2–3; emphasis added]

Zion, as used in this scripture, means America. In fact, America is Zion. At times the term is used to include both the North and South American continents. In some references the word *Zion* is used to designate the area in and about Jackson County, Missouri, where the New Jerusalem will be built, which city is itself sometimes called Zion. From Zion the law of God shall eventually go forth into all the world.

It is this fact and this purpose, the building of Zion on this hemisphere, . . . which seem to be the dominant elements in all of God's dealings with them who possess this land. . . .

*Thus America's ultimate God-given destiny, planned by the Creator [and by him through Isaiah declared], is that out of her shall go forth the law. [Clark, *Stand Fast*, pp. 174–75]*

This destiny no power of men or devils can thwart.

Let us now consider for a moment what the Lord has done since he led Columbus to America to move her toward her divine destiny. Reference has already been made to the early settlers, to the growth of the original colonies, to the Declaration of Independence, and to the success of the colonists in the Revolutionary War through which their declared independence was won. Later on, between 1820 and 1844, the Lord revealed a new and complete dispensation of his gospel that contains the laws of the God of this land,

who is Jesus Christ. This was, of course, made imperative by the divine decree that those who dwell here must obey such laws or be swept off the land. His laws have always been given to the inhabitants of America. He gave them to the antediluvians through his prophets from Adam to Noah. He gave them to the Jaredites through the prophets from the brother of Jared to Ether. To the Nephites in a personal visitation and through his prophets from Lehi to Moroni, he revealed his laws. To this generation he has given them anew through his prophet Joseph Smith, Jr.

Free Agency Needed for Obedience to God's Laws

The giving of these laws, however, would have been abortive without a civil government that would guarantee men the untrammelled exercise of their God-given free agency. Without such a civil government men could not be bound by the laws of God even though they were revealed. As a matter of fact, free agency underlies all of God's laws. It is God's law of liberty. It is the basis of existence.

God wants men to do good, but he never forces them and does not want them to be forced. He placed in and left with them the power of election. When they do good, he honors them because they could have done evil. When they are coerced, they are entitled to no such honor. God allows men to make their own choices, and he has reserved to himself the judgment as to the correctness of their choices.

Free agency has always had rough going, however. Over it the War in Heaven was fought. In the earth it has been abridged by almost all governments, civil and ecclesiastical. Apostate churchmen, kings, and other rulers have from the beginning arrogated judgment unto themselves. They have, contrary to God's law of liberty, preempted man's right, with or without his consent, to determine what would be best for them to do and by every means

within their power have undertaken to force men to do their bidding.

We have learned by sad experience that it is the nature and disposition of almost all men, as soon as they get a little authority, as they suppose, they will immediately begin to exercise unrighteous dominion. [D&C 121:39]

On July 3, 1776, no government on earth guaranteed God's law of liberty; but on July 4, 1776, in the Declaration of Independence, that law was declared anew in the earth.

Everywhere in America, says John Adams, the people received the Declaration of Independence "as though it was a decree promulgated from heaven." And well they might, for it was a strange and wonderful thing. "Freedom hath been hunted round the globe," wrote Tom Paine. "Asia and Africa have long expelled her. Europe regards her like a stranger, and England hath given her warning to depart. O! receive the fugitive and prepare in time an asylum for mankind." [Hugh Nibley, *The World and the Prophets* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Co., 1954), pp. 170–71]

The colonial patriots did receive the fugitive. They fought and won the war of the revolution to obtain freedom. They, under the inspiration of heaven and the interposition of the Almighty, established the Constitution of the United States to secure freedom, God's law of liberty, not only for all Americans but also for all men.

In this manner did God move America into position to fulfill her destiny. That it was *he* who did it, he himself affirms. In 1833 he told his people, who had been scattered by their enemies, to

continue to importune for redress, and redemption, . . .

According to the laws and constitution of the people, which I have suffered to be established, and should be maintained for the rights and

protection of all flesh [not just for America], according to just and holy principles;

That every man may act in doctrine and principle pertaining to futurity, according to the moral agency which I have given unto him, that every man may be accountable for his own sins in the day of judgment.

Therefore, it is not right that any man should be in bondage one to another.

And for this purpose have I established the Constitution of this land, by the hands of wise men whom I raised up unto this very purpose. [D&C 101:76–80; emphasis added]

In this declaration the Lord reveals three things: (1) that the Constitution of the United States was established by him; (2) that the purpose of it was to protect men in the exercise of their God-given moral agency; and (3) that every man should eventually, under its just and holy principles, enjoy such protection.

Did time permit, we could with profit consider the Constitutional provisions that guarantee this freedom, which, pursuant to her declared destiny, is to go forth from America to maintain the "rights and protection of all flesh." I refer you who are interested in this divinely established guarantee to the late President J. Reuben Clark, Jr.'s, great speech—"America—A Chosen Land of the Lord," which you can find in the book *Stand Fast by Our Constitution* (pp. 173–98).

I think I have now said enough to sustain my thesis that America has from the beginning been, and now is, in God's economy, a choice and favored land, and that he has decreed for her a great destiny. I shall therefore conclude with a statement of these basic facts.

The blessings of our constitutional freedoms were secured for us by the bounty of the Almighty through the patriotism and sacrifices of the founding fathers. They were preserved for us through the suffering and trials of the Civil War. For them we owe a deep debt of gratitude to God and our forebears.

By the grace of God we occupy this land, the blessings of which are unequalled in any other land. It is difficult for us of this generation to fully appreciate these blessings because they were not won by the shedding of our own blood, sweat, and tears, but by that of others.

There are some things, however, that we must no longer fail to appreciate. If we do so, we shall do it at our peril. Chief among these things is man's free agency, which was provided for in the Constitution as it was originally adopted and interpreted. America's destiny requires that the constitutional safeguards of this freedom be appreciated and maintained. It is imperative that they be maintained and observed here in America in order that they may go out from here undiluted to the protection of all flesh. Whether this generation of Americans will live up to its opportunity to obey and preserve them, particularly God's law of liberty—including the gospel of Jesus Christ, who is the God of this land—remains to be seen. If it does not, the wicked among us will be destroyed, as were the wicked preceding the appearance of the risen Lord to the Nephites. God will spare the righteous and raise up another generation in this land, for out of Zion the law of God will go forth.

There are those among us who feel, and perhaps with good cause, that these constitutional freedoms are being, both wittingly and unwittingly, eroded. If this be so, let it be known that with the loss of each constitutional freedom we are surrendering our inheritance in this favored land.

What can we do about it? Let me give you a suggestion in the words of the immortal Lincoln. As I read the word *laws* and I quote

him, think of the laws of the gospel and those constitutional laws calculated to preserve our free agency—*God's law of liberty*. Here is the quotation:

*Let every American, every lover of liberty, every well-wisher to his posterity, swear by the blood of the Revolution never to violate in the least particular the laws of the country [and let Latter-day Saints include in that the laws of the gospel of Jesus Christ], and never to tolerate their violation by others. As the patriots of '76 did to the support of the Declaration of Independence, so to the support of the Constitution and the laws [of God], let every American pledge his life, his property and his sacred honour; let every man remember that to violate the law is to trample upon the blood of his fathers and to tear the charter of his own and his children's liberty. Let reverence for the laws be breathed by every American mother to the lisping babe that prattles on her lap. Let it be taught in schools, in seminaries, and in colleges. Let it be written in primers, spelling books, and almanacs. Let it be preached from the pulpits, proclaimed in legislative halls, and enforced in courts of justice. In short, let it become the political religion of the nation. [John Wesley Hill, *Abraham Lincoln — Man of God*, 4th ed. (New York: Putnam, 1930), p. 73]*

Now, my beloved brothers and sisters, young and old, let us—who know and believe so much more than others about the fate and ultimate destiny of America—lead the way by precept and example to the realization of that great destiny, I humbly pray. And I leave with you my blessing, in the name of Jesus Christ. Amen.