

NOTES AND COMMUNICATIONS

Knowledge of Christ to Come

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And behold, he shall be born of Mary, at Jerusalem which is the land of our forefathers, she being a virgin.

...

And he shall go forth, suffering pains and afflictions and temptations of every kind. . . .

And he will take upon him death, that he may loose the bands of death which bind his people; and he will take upon him their infirmities. (Alma 7:10–12)

To those who deny prophecy, it seems impossible that Alma could have known details such as these from the life of Christ, who had not yet been born. The earliest Book of Mormon prophets, such as Lehi and his sons Nephi and Jacob, were aware of such things as Christ's name and title, his baptism by John, his teachings, his selection of twelve apostles, his miraculous healings and casting out of devils, and his death on the cross (1 Nephi 10:7–10; 11:27–33; 2 Nephi 10:3; 25:19).

While the twentieth-century critical mind is hard-pressed to believe that details of Christ's life could be known long before he was born, early Christians readily accepted the idea. Other documents indicate that Adam and other prophets knew of Christ's atonement.

For example, in the *Book of the Rolls*¹ God declares to Adam, "I will send my dear Son; He will come down to the earth, He will

¹ The *Book of the Rolls* is a pseudepigraphic work known only from an Arabic version, though attributed to Clement, a disciple of Simon Peter. It





be clothed with a body from a Virgin of thy race, named Mary.”²
The preexistent Christ tells Adam,

I will come down to thee, and in thy house will I dwell and with thy body will I be clothed. . . . I will fast forty days; . . . I will receive baptism; . . . I will be lifted up on the cross; . . . I will endure lies; . . . I will be beaten with the whip; . . . I will taste vinegar; . . . my hands will be nailed; . . . I will be pierced with a spear; . . . I will thunder in the height; . . . I will darken the sun; . . . I will cleave the rocks; . . . after three days, which I have spent in the grave, I will raise up the body which I took from thee.³

On his deathbed, Adam told his son Seth,

God will come down to the earth. . . . He will be incarnate of a Virgin girl named Mary. . . . He will do wonders and signs openly; He will walk on the waves of the sea as if walking on the dry land; He will rebuke the winds in a manifest way, and they will be led by His command. He will call to the waves of the sea, and they will answer Him obediently. At His command the blind shall see, the lepers shall be cleansed, the deaf shall hear, the dumb shall speak, the deformed shall be straightened, the lame shall spring up, the palsied shall rise and walk. Many rebels shall be led to God, those who have wandered shall be led aright, and devils shall be driven away.⁴

reflects the same tradition found in other ancient Christian works about the earliest generations of mankind, such as the *Conflict of Adam and Eve with Satan*, the *Cave of Treasures*, and *The Bee*.

² *Book of the Rolls* f.96a, in Margaret D. Gibson, *Apocrypha Arabica* (London: Clay and Sons, 1901), 10.

³ *Book of the Rolls* f.100b–101a, in *ibid.*, 16; for the thunder, darkening of the sun, and rending of the rocks at Christ’s crucifixion, see 1 Nephi 12:4, Helaman 14:20–22; and 3 Nephi 8:17–20.

⁴ *Book of the Rolls* f.100a-b, in *ibid.*, 15.





We are struck with the similarity between these passages and ones found in the Book of Mormon, especially the prophecy of Alma cited at the beginning.

