

## LESSON ONE

# Christopher Columbus: The Man, The Myth, The Legend

Did you know that Christopher Columbus, the man commonly credited with discovering America, followed in the footsteps of other great explorers who had no knowledge of the existence of the American continent? Before him, the most famous early discoverer was the Norse adventurer, Leif Erikson, who hailed from Iceland and arrived in North America nearly 500 years before Columbus! The Vikings called this new land “Vinland” or Wine Land because of all of the grapes that were found to make wine.

Because of a harsh climate and tensions with Native Americans – who lived in America long before it was discovered by European explorers – they didn’t stay very long. In honor of the courage and bravery of Erikson and his followers, we celebrate Leif Erikson Day annually on October 9<sup>th</sup>.

Since the Vikings left without creating a record or informing other Europeans, we point toward Columbus when we talk about America’s discovery, as it was a direct result of his voyage that the America we know and love today came into being.

To understand more about Columbus, you must know he was born in Italy, and lived a life serving God and his Christian faith. Columbus quoted Psalms 65:5 as his inspiration: the God who is “The hope of all the ends of the earth and of the farthest sea.”

Columbus yearned to get started on his journey, but first he had to find a wealthy King and Queen willing to pay for his trip. After being turned down by many different countries, finally, Queen Isabella and King Ferdinand of Spain agreed to support Columbus and his 3 ships: The Nina, the Pinta and the Santa Maria.

Columbus had four total voyages to The New World. His FIRST landed them in the Caribbean Islands, south of the United States that we know today. This journey was largely one of discovery, a never before seen part of the globe, and native people who had never encountered Europeans before. On this trip, Columbus was given the title, “Governor of the New World” by the Queen and King of Spain.

Columbus encountered two groups of native people in the Caribbean islands, the Taino, a kind and gentle group, who he called “the best people in the world,” and the Caribs, a vicious and hate-filled tribe on the island. The Caribs were known to attack the Taino often, killing many and taking women

as their prisoners. Columbus, a Godly man, befriended the Taino tribe before heading back to Spain.

Columbus's second journey was primarily one for colonization, or building cities and homes for Spanish settlers in the New World. On this trip, Columbus brought 1,200 Spanish people and 17 ships to help build the land. Trouble started to set in when the Spanish settlers decided they didn't like taking orders from Columbus, an Italian man, and many did not want to help the Taino tribe either. So, after three hard years, Columbus returned to Spain.

Columbus's third journey was met with extreme resistance- or hatred- toward him when he arrived on land. The Spanish settlers had taken over power while Columbus was gone and they were not interested in having him come back to order them around. He advocated for the Taino tribe, wanting to give them equality and citizenship, which angered the Spanish settlers. They arrested Columbus and sent him back to Spain in chains. When he arrived back to the Queen and King of Spain, they exonerated him, which means they let him go free.

Columbus was determined to reach Asia still, so he set off again at sea. His fourth voyage ended when his ship was wrecked off of the island of Jamaica, where he lived for a year, before returning to Spain. It wasn't long after his return to Spain that his health failed and he died two years later.

Christopher Columbus was a man known for his adventurous attitude and Christian morality. He lived by the Bible, and always made fair trades with the native people. The natives had lots of gold, but they didn't have any value on it, so they traded gold to the settlers who valued it like money. Columbus made sure the settlers always traded with something of value in return.

We often hear about the native people's battle for their land from the Europeans, who came in and took it away. It's worth noting that Columbus only allowed fair trades for land and mandated that trading be enforced, no stealing allowed!

Also worth noting, the main cause of death was not due to battles between native Americans and Europeans, but death was largely caused by the unintentional spread of diseases and germs for the natives and the settlers alike. They didn't have the medicines or cleaning supplies we have today.

Christopher Columbus has been celebrated for five hundred years, with over 600 monuments in honor of him around the world. In America, our nation's capitol, Washington D.C. is even named for him – District of Columbia: or Columbus! Our nation exists today because men like Columbus dared to explore and spread the word of God. To show our respect, every October, our nation has a day of remembrance for Christopher Columbus and the indigenous people in America.

