



Books in Review

THE BIBLE VS. THE BOOK OF MORMON

by Living Hope Ministries

66-minute video, \$19.95

The folks responsible for the impressive presentation using DNA evidence against *The Book of Mormon* have delivered another excellent video production. Mormons have long claimed that *The Book of Mormon*, their most well-known scripture, is superior to the Bible. Living Hope Ministries, in their latest undertaking, examines whether *The Book of Mormon* is really greater than — or even comparable to — the Bible. Enlisted are the testimonies of archaeologists, anthropologists, geographers, and linguists in response to that question. The effort comprises about 40 interviews in the United States and six foreign countries.

The presentation begins with a brief historical background and timeline of both the Bible and *The Book of Mormon*. The viewer is then confronted with fact after fact as to the lack of evidence for the Mormon scripture. Among the facts presented:

- No maps of the lands and locations described in *The Book of Mormon* are available because they cannot be established. The Latter-day Saints church is silent on the geography of its scripture.
- It is impossible that the vast civilizations portrayed in *The Book of Mormon* could have existed without leaving an archaeological trace.
- *The Book of Mormon* is wrong in its details of the agriculture, animals, and weaponry of the early American continent.
- *The Book of Mormon* is lacking any manuscript evidence, thereby revealing itself to be a 19th-century creation. Likewise, linguists discount “Reformed Egyptian,” the language from which Joseph Smith, Jr. is said to have translated his scripture.

When these findings are contrasted with what scholars know about the Bible, it is confirmed as authentic, while *The Book of Mormon* is discredited as a fraud. *The Book of Mormon* is ultimately asked to be taken on faith, but faith

is not a belief *against* the evidence, but a *response* to it. As one scholar noted, *The Book of Mormon* has absolutely no authority or integrity whatsoever.

The video also contrasts the Jesus of the Bible with the Jesus of *The Book of Mormon*. The conclusion is that the Jesus of *The Book of Mormon* is a product of Joseph Smith, Jr., and does not relate to the Jesus Christ of the Bible. This statement is denied by most Mormons, but is sanctioned by current LDS prophet and president Gordon B. Hinckley.

This is a wonderful presentation, not only to entreat Mormons to consider and weigh the facts, but also for Christians to ponder and comprehend. It is available in both DVD and VHS formats.

—MKG

WHAT'S THE DEAL WITH WICCA?

by Steve Russo

Bethany House Publishers, 192 pages, \$11.99

Wicca, or witchcraft, is increasingly attracting teens across the country. Television shows such as *Sabrina* and *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*; movies such as *The Craft* and *Harry Potter*; “Goddess” t-shirts, jewelry, and other pop-culture items all make it possible for a person to become immersed in the witchcraft theme. Celebrities such as Tori Amos, Stevie Nicks, Sarah McLachlan, Cybill Shepherd, Roseanne, Chrissie Hynde, Olympia Dukakis, Marianne Williamson, Deepak Chopra, Erica Jong, Camille Paglia, and Fairuza Balk all add to the saturation.

Gone is the black-hatted, pointy-nosed wicked woman riding into the night sky on a broomstick. Now it is the attractive, sensible teenagers portrayed as either Sabrina or Buffy or the clever Samantha of *Bewitched*. These characters, with the help of a complete shift through various media images, have given Wicca a positive appeal. Wicca has become the girl-friendly religion of magic and psychic powers, which emphasizes feelings and experiences.

Russo points out the differences between Wicca and Christianity, and throughout his work brings the reader back to what the Bible teaches regarding various issues

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apologize. He reiterated that he had been 'disoriented, confused, and depressed' lately and that certain details he provided were not true. He did not help identify a child from his apartment complex. He did not help an elderly woman get a ride. And while he was the last one to leave his complex, 'the truth is that there was nobody around here for me to help,' he said in a voice message to *Christianity Today*. "The essential truth: I lied."

Manning's ensuing apology for his lies, due to his being "disoriented, confused, and depressed," possibly should also be called into question, because in the interview he responded to the magazine with detail and distinctness. Perhaps Manning's embracing of contemplative prayer may be a better explanation. The technique calls for one to empty one's mind, then fill it with imaginative experiences and allowing Christ to be the source of our words and actions.

Hurricane Katrina was not the first disaster Manning has encountered since moving to New Orleans in 1982. In January 2004, a fire engulfed his home. Despite the loss of personal property, Manning escaped the fire unharmed.

—MKG

BOOKS IN REVIEW

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that Wicca presents. A full chapter deals with the topic, "Whose Word You Gonna Trust?" While many confuse Wicca with Satanism, the author points out that there are distinctions while remembering the two religions' denial of the truth.

The book is an informative work written either for a searching parent or for a teen who is either dabbling in the craft or who has a friend enticed by it. In addition to discussion questions with Scripture references, there are several appendices with very helpful information, including a glossary of wiccan/witchcraft terms, symbols, and holidays.

—AMG

UNDER THE BANNER OF HEAVEN:

A Story of Violent Faith

by Jon Krakauer

Doubleday, 399 pages, \$26.00

Award-winning author Jon Krakauer has ventured into the world of religion for the first time with this remarkable book about Mormon Fundamentalism, and

its historic ties to Joseph Smith, Jr., Brigham Young, and others revered by mainstream Mormons.

Krakauer, whose earlier works on mountain climbing and wilderness adventure have been acclaimed for their thorough research, richness of detail, and air of suspense, was intrigued by the brutal 1984 murders of a young woman and her 15-month-old daughter, in American Fork, Utah. Within hours of the crime it was determined that the murderers were two of the woman's brothers-in-law, Ron and Dan Lafferty, who hated her because she influenced her husband not to submit to the demands of their cult. She also had encouraged her sisters-in-law to reject their husbands' pressure to accept plural marriage.

Most appalling of all was the fact that Ron Lafferty fancied himself to be the "one mighty and strong" who had been prophesied by Joseph Smith, Jr., (*D&C*, Section 85), and claimed that the murders were in obedience to a direct "removal revelation" from the Lord.

The title of the book is taken from a sermon preached by LDS President John Taylor in Salt Lake City, on Jan. 4, 1880, in which he said, "God is greater than the United States, and when the Government conflicts with heaven we will be ranged under the banner of heaven and against the Government. The United States says we cannot marry more than one wife. God says different. ... Polygamy is a divine institution. It has been handed down direct from God. The United States cannot abolish it. No nation on earth can prevent it, nor all the nations of the earth combined; these are my sentiments and all of you who sympathize with me in this position will raise your right hands. I defy the United States; I will obey God" (pg. 250).

The principal value of this book is Krakauer's description of salient aspects of the history of the LDS church and the powerful way in which he ties the practices of more than 40,000 self-proclaimed Mormon fundamentalists with the origins and the historical development of the Mormon church.

Cautions for potential readers are needed in two areas: Krakauer is not a believer, and in his view all people of faith have the potential to commit the same atrocious acts that the Laffertys acted out for their "religious" convictions. He wrote, "All religious belief is a function of nonrational faith. And faith, by its very definition, tends to be impervious to intellectual argument or academic criticism" (pg. 68). To him, there is an equivalence between fundamentalist Mormons, Catholics, Pentecostals, Evangelical Christians, and members of Al-Qaeda.

Also, *be forewarned* that because of the nature of the crime being reported, descriptions at times are gruesome. And, because of the nature of the criminals, quotes from them are extremely coarse, lewd, and blasphemous. With these cautions in mind, for its historical value and well-written style, this is a significant book.

—RLG