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IS THE BOOK OF MORMON CREDIBLE?¹

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"I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting the one who called you by the grace of Christ and are turning to a different gospel—which is really no gospel at all. Evidently some people are throwing you into confusion and are trying to pervert the gospel of Christ. But even if we or an angel from heaven should preach a gospel other than the one we preached to you, let him be eternally condemned! As we have already said, so now I say again: If anybody is preaching to you a gospel other than what you accepted, let him be eternally condemned!" (Gal. 1:6–9 NIV).

In 1823, the angel Moroni allegedly visited Mormon prophet Joseph Smith and divulged the location of some golden plates containing the "fullness of the everlasting gospel." These plates—abridged by Moroni and his father, Mormon, 1,400 years earlier—were written in "reformed Egyptian hieroglyphics." Along with the plates, Smith found a pair of magical eyeglasses that he used to translate the cryptic writing into English. The result was a new revelation called the *Book of Mormon* and a new religion called *Mormonism*.

How millions can take the Book of Mormon seriously is almost beyond comprehension. First, while Smith referred to the Book of Mormon as "the most correct of any book on earth and the keystone of our religion," its flaws run the gamut from the serious to the silly. In the category of serious, the Book of Mormon contains modalistic language that militates against the biblical doctrine of the Trinity (Ether 3:14). In the category of silly, a man struggles to catch his breath after having his head cut off (Ether 15:31).

Furthermore, while archeology is a powerful testimony to the accuracy of the Bible the same cannot be said for the Book of Mormon. Not only is there no archeological evidence for a language such as "reformed Egyptian hieroglyphics," there is no archeological support for lands such as the "land of Moron" (Ether 7:6). Nor is there any archeological evidence to buttress the notion that the Jaredites, Nephites, and Lamanites migrated from Israel to the Americas. On the contrary, both archeology and anthropology demonstrate conclusively that the people and places chronicled in the Book of Mormon are little more than the product of a fertile imagination.

Finally, Joseph Smith asserted that the golden plates were translated "by the power of God" and produced "the most correct of any book on earth." Joseph F. Smith, the sixth president of the Mormon Church, went so far as to say that the words were not only correct but "every letter was given to [Smith] by the gift and power of God." In reality, however, the Book of Mormon has had to be corrected thousands of times to compensate for Smith's poor grammar and spelling.

The Book of Mormon is fraught with other errors as well. For example, "Benjamin" was changed to "Mosiah" when Mormon leaders realized that in the chronology of the Book of Mormon King Benjamin had already died—thus he would have been hard pressed to "interpret" the engravings mentioned in Mosiah 21:28.

Perhaps the greatest crack in the credibility of the Book of Mormon is that whole sections were derived directly from the King James Version of the Bible—this despite the fact that according to Mormon chronology, the Book of Mormon predates the King James Version by more than a thousand years. Little wonder that Mormons accept the Book of Mormon based on a "burning in the bosom" rather than on history and evidence.

— Hank Hanegraaff

1. Adapted from Hank Hanegraaff, *The Bible Answer Book* (Nashville: J. Countryman, 2004).