



Joseph Smith: Rough Stone Rolling

By Richard Lyman Bushman

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Joseph Smith, America's preeminent visionary and prophet, rose from a modest background to found the largest indigenous Christian church in American history. Without the benefit of wealth, education, or social position, he published the 584-page *Book of Mormon* when he was twenty-three; organized a church when he was twenty-four; and founded cities, built temples, and attracted thousands of followers before his violent death at age thirty-eight. Rather than perishing with him, Mormonism migrated to the Rocky Mountains, flourished there, and now claims millions of followers worldwide.

In *Joseph Smith: Rough Stone Rolling*, Richard Bushman, an esteemed American cultural historian and a practicing Mormon, tells how Smith formed a new religion from the ground up. Moving beyond the popular stereotype of Smith as a colorful fraud, the book explores the inner workings of his personality—his personal piety, his temper, his affection for family and friends, and his incredible determination. It describes how he received revelations and why his followers believed them.

Smith was a builder of cities. He sought to form egalitarian, just, and open communities under God and laid out a plan for ideal cities, which he hoped would fill the world. Adopted as the model for hundreds of Mormon settlements in the West, Smith's urban vision may have left a more lasting imprint on the landscape than that of any other American.

He was controversial from his earliest years. His followers honored him as a man who spoke for God and restored biblical religion. His enemies maligned him as a dangerous religious fanatic, an American Mohammad, and drove the Mormons from every place in which they settled. Smith's ultimate assassination by an armed mob raises the question of whether American democracy can tolerate visionaries.

The book gives more attention to Joseph Smith's innovative religious thought than any previous biography. As Bushman writes, "His followers derived their energy and purpose from the religious world he brought into being." Some of the teachings were controversial, such as property redistribution and plural marriage, but Smith's revelations also delved into cosmology and the history of God. They spoke of the origins of the human personality and the purpose of life. While

thoroughly Christian, Smith radically reconceived the relationship between humans and God. The book evaluates the Mormon prophet's bold contributions to Christian theology and situates him culturally in the modern world.

Published on the two hundredth anniversary of Smith's birth, *Joseph Smith: Rough Stone Rolling* is an in-depth portrayal of the mysterious figure behind one of the world's fastest growing faiths.

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Editorial Review

From Publishers Weekly

Starred Review. How should a historian depict a man's life when that man, and his religion, remain a mystery to so many 200 years after his birth? Bushman, an emeritus professor at Columbia University and author of *Joseph Smith and the Beginnings of Mormonism*, greatly expands on that previous work, filling in many details of the founding prophet of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, and carrying the story through to the end of Smith's life. Many continue to view Smith as an enigmatic and controversial figure. Bushman locates him in his historical and cultural context, fleshing out the many nuances of 19th-century American life that produced such a fertile ground for emerging religions. The author, a practicing Mormon, is aware that his book stands in the intersection of faith and scholarship, but does not avoid the problematic aspects of Smith's life and work, such as his practice of polygamy, his early attempts at treasure-seeking and his later political aspirations. In the end, Smith emerges as a genuine American phenomenon, a man driven by inspiration but not unaffected by his cultural context. This is a remarkable book, wonderfully readable and supported by exhaustive research. For anyone interested in the Mormon experience, it will be required reading for years to come. (Oct. 10)

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From [The New Yorker](#)

Joseph Smith claimed that he was visited by an angel who gave him golden plates from which he transcribed the Book of Mormon, and he had organized a church before he was twenty-five. His personal charisma and his administrative genius helped spread Mormonism throughout the Western United States, turning the sect into a legislative federation complete with social and political institutions. There were always those who thought Smith a charlatan and a fanatic, and, in 1844, at the age of thirty-eight, he was fatally shot by an angry mob. Bushman is both an emeritus professor of history at Columbia and a practicing Mormon, and his exhaustive biography carefully treads a path between reverence and objectivity, as when he investigates the phenomenon of "plural marriage"; Smith, in order to establish "a Righteous race . . . upon the Earth," had more than thirty wives.

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From [Booklist](#)

Starred Review Peter Burnett, California's first governor, never converted to Mormonism, but he came away from his encounter with the Mormon prophet Joseph Smith convinced that he had met "much more than an ordinary man" teaching "strange and striking" doctrines. Both the extraordinary man and his highly distinctive doctrines receive illuminating attention in this landmark biography, published to mark the bicentennial of the American prophet's birth. A distinguished Columbia historian, Bushman stresses the boy seer's thoroughly ordinary origins--born to a hard-pressed New England farm family and denied all but the rudiments of a formal education--to emphasize the marvel of the religious revolution he brought about. Beginning with the publication of a new volume of scripture--the Book of Mormon--recounting the resurrected Christ's ministry in ancient America, that revolution eventually produced a dynamic church run by a complex lay ministry and committed to spreading its message worldwide. Though himself a practicing Latter-day Saint (Mormon), Bushman steers clear of hagiography by permitting readers to hear the voices not only of the prophet's loyal followers but also of various skeptics and adversaries. Readers see in particular detail the views of those who rose against Smith during the turbulent final years of his life, when the practice of plural marriage helped stoke a firestorm of religious conflict. Though that storm ended with the prophet's death at the hands of an angry mob, Bushman gives the slain revelator credit for the remarkable durability of the church he left behind. A deft portrait of a deeply controversial figure. *Bryce Christensen*

Users Review

From reader reviews:

Michael Wickham:

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Stephen Galvan:

The reason? Because this Joseph Smith: Rough Stone Rolling is an unordinary book that the inside of the book waiting for you to snap that but latter it will distress you with the secret this inside. Reading this book alongside it was fantastic author who also write the book in such remarkable way makes the content interior easier to understand, entertaining means but still convey the meaning thoroughly. So , it is good for you for not hesitating having this any more or you going to regret it. This book will give you a lot of gains than the other book have got such as help improving your ability and your critical thinking method. So , still want to delay having that book? If I ended up you I will go to the e-book store hurriedly.

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