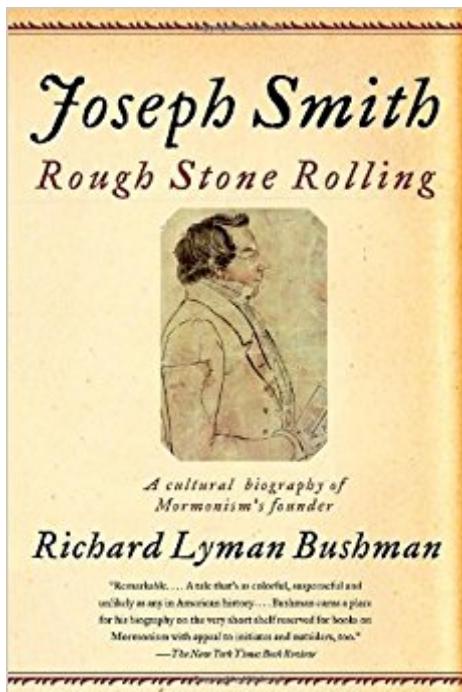


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Joseph Smith: Rough Stone Rolling



Synopsis

Founder of the largest indigenous Christian church in American history, Joseph Smith published the 584-page Book of Mormon when he was twenty-three and went on to organize a church, found cities, and attract thousands of followers before his violent death at age thirty-eight. Richard Bushman, an esteemed cultural historian and a practicing Mormon, moves beyond the popular stereotype of Smith as a colorful fraud to explore his personality, his relationships with others, and how he received revelations. An arresting narrative of the birth of the Mormon Church, Joseph Smith: Rough Stone Rolling also brilliantly evaluates the prophet's bold contributions to Christian theology and his cultural place in the modern world.

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Customer Reviews

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) Copyright © Reed Business Information, a division of Reed Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

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

It took a second reading to come to a fuller appreciation of Dr. Bushman's historical narrative and analysis.

I applaud Mr. Bushman for writing such a well researched book. The notes are amazing (it takes 1.5x's as long to read it because there are so many notes to reference in the back of the book) and have led to reputable sources. Many of the points and events from Joseph Smith's life that are discussed shed so much light as to how/why the early church was the way it was. Some are difficult pills to swallow for active LDS members, but are nonetheless important points to discuss. JS was not a perfect person (as I'm sure he would have admitted) and Mr. Bushman appropriately shows the virtues and vices that JS had.

Perhaps the best book on Joseph Smith. I think every mormon should be required to read this book.

Done well for such a complex subject.

Bushman said that he tried to approach Joseph Smith's life from his own perspective and tried to show what was in his mind as he played out the almost incredible life experiences and new creations. I have read several biographies and each seems to take a different approach. This book shows all the different possible sources and also perspectives of the people of the day, and also many who doubted that he actually received direct revelation from God, and ability to translate. The author illustrates what was going on in the community and nation as these episodes unfurled. The life of Joseph Smith seems larger than life, even though most of what happened is documented sufficiently that it is hard to disbelieve. The tailings of his life and creations still live. The evolution of beliefs and dogma are expounded on and amplified by his progenitors. I was especially intrigued by his trial and error discovering what really was "God's will". It seems that it would have been easier and even more credible if he got it right the first time, every time, but then that would not have allowed the growth and development of the participants. This book really shows that "God" is not just getting us through this process called life, but is challenging and changing our will and endurance with serious trials. This book really shows the trauma and suffering of the early Mormon members and the conflicts that caused some to leave and some to stay with the Church Joseph Smith formed. Although Bushman admits that he is biased, he seems honest in his presentation. Certainly this book creates some conflict with the sanitized versions, but I feel that it does justice to history and reality and brings to light some aspects that previously were only found in anti Mormon books. I felt that Bushman goes into a lot of historical detail that some may find boring but in the end, I appreciated the complete story that was told. It has strongly supported and expanded my strong belief that this couldn't have been a fabrication but was in fact the process that restored Christ's True and Living Church. True seekers will find this very interesting.

This book came highly recommended and it delivered on that expectation. If you want a look at the man, Joseph Smith, behind the role of prophet and instrument in God's work, you can't do any better than this. For years, what I knew of Joseph is what I learned in church and then of late by those who sought to tear him down. After reading this, I see Joseph as a rounded human being: he has depth. Not only did the author show his strengths, he showed his weaknesses. He showed his humanity and his determination to fulfill the divine mandates that directed his life. He showed the iron conviction which drove him and the great anxieties he faced as he tried to make sense of the directions he felt he had to take to follow God's will. In the end, I have greater appreciation for Joseph and for Emma and the travails and joys they experienced together. This is a great book!!

Outstanding historical biography. Bushman delves into the religious doctrine as deeply as necessary to illuminate the motives of his subject and provide context for his narrative, but no deeper. The result is a book that provides plenty of meat for even the most knowledgeable believer to chew on, while at the same time presenting a story that is completely accessible to outsiders.

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