

= Joseph Smith =

Joseph Smith , Jr . (December 23 , 1805 ? June 27 , 1844) was an American religious leader and founder of Mormonism and the Latter Day Saint movement . When he was twenty @-@ four , Smith published the Book of Mormon . By the time of his death fourteen years later , he had attracted tens of thousands of followers and founded a religious culture that continues to the present .

Smith was born in Sharon , Vermont , but by 1817 , he had moved with his family to the burned @-@ over district of western New York , a site of intense religious revivalism during the Second Great Awakening . According to Smith , he experienced a series of visions , including one in which he saw " two personages " (presumably God the Father and Jesus Christ) and others in which an angel named Moroni directed him to a buried book of golden plates inscribed with a Judeo @-@ Christian history of an ancient American civilization of Israelites who traveled to the Americas from Jerasalem six centuries before the birth of Christ . In 1830 , Smith published what he said was an English translation of these plates , the Book of Mormon . The same year he organized the Church of Christ , calling it a restoration of the early Christian church . Members of the church were later called " Latter Day Saints " , or " Mormons " , and in 1838 , Smith announced a revelation that renamed the church as the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints .

In 1831 , Smith and his followers moved west , planning to build a communalistic American Zion . They first gathered in Kirtland , Ohio , and established an outpost in Independence , Missouri , which was intended to be Zion 's " center place " . During the 1830s , Smith sent out missionaries , published revelations , and supervised construction of the expensive Kirtland Temple . Nevertheless , the collapse of the church @-@ sponsored Kirtland Safety Society and violent skirmishes with non @-@ Mormon Missourians caused Smith and his followers to establish a new settlement at Nauvoo , Illinois , where he became a spiritual and political leader . In 1844 , Smith and the Nauvoo city council angered non @-@ Mormons by destroying a newspaper that had criticized Smith 's power and practice of polygamy . After Smith was imprisoned in Carthage , Illinois , he was killed when a mob stormed the jailhouse .

Smith published many revelations and other texts that his followers regard as scripture . His teachings include unique views about the nature of God , cosmology , family structures , political organization , and religious collectivism . His followers regard him as a prophet comparable to Moses and Elijah , and several religious denominations consider themselves the continuation of the church he organized , including The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter @-@ day Saints and the Community of Christ .

= = Life = =

= = = Early years (1805 ? 27) = = =

Joseph Smith , Jr. was born on December 23 , 1805 , in Sharon , Vermont , to Lucy Mack Smith and her husband Joseph Sr. , a merchant and farmer . After suffering a crippling bone infection when he was seven , the younger Smith hobbled around on crutches for three years . In 1816 ? 17 , after an ill @-@ fated business venture and three years of crop failures , the Smith family moved to the western New York village of Palmyra , and eventually took a mortgage on a 100 @-@ acre (40 ha) farm in the nearby town of Manchester .

During the Second Great Awakening , the region was a hotbed of religious enthusiasm ; and between 1817 and 1825 , there were several camp meetings and revivals in the Palmyra area . Although Smith 's parents disagreed about religion , the family was caught up in this excitement . Smith later said he became interested in religion at about the age of twelve ; without doubt , he participated in church classes and read the Bible . As a teenager , he may have been sympathetic to Methodism . With other family members , Smith also engaged in religious folk magic , not an uncommon practice at the time . Both his parents and his maternal grandfather reportedly had visions or dreams that they believed communicated messages from God . Smith said that although

he had become concerned about the welfare of his soul , he was confused by the claims of competing religious denominations .

Years later Smith said that in 1820 he had received a vision that resolved his religious confusion . While praying in a wooded area near his home , he said that God , in a vision , had told him his sins were forgiven and that all contemporary churches had " turned aside from the gospel . " Smith said he told the experience to a preacher , who dismissed the story with contempt ; but the experience was largely unknown , even to most Mormons , until the 1840s . Although Smith may have understood the event as a personal conversion , this " First Vision " later grew in importance among Mormons , who today see it as the first event in the " restoration of the Gospel " .

Smith said that in 1823 while praying one night for forgiveness from his sins , he was visited by an angel named Moroni , who revealed the location of a buried book made of golden plates , as well as other artifacts , including a breastplate and a set of interpreters composed of two seer stones set in a frame , which had been hidden in a hill in Manchester near his home . Smith said he attempted to remove the plates the next morning but was unsuccessful because the angel prevented him . Smith reported that during the next four years , he made annual visits to the hill but each time returned without the plates .

Meanwhile , the Smith family faced financial hardship due in part to the November 1823 death of Smith 's oldest brother Alvin , who had assumed a leadership role in the family . Family members supplemented their meager farm income by hiring out for odd jobs and working as treasure seekers , a type of magical supernaturalism common during the period . Smith was said to have an ability to locate lost items by looking into a seer stone , which he also used in treasure hunting , including several unsuccessful attempts to find buried treasure sponsored by a wealthy farmer in Chenango County , New York . In 1826 , Smith was brought before a Chenango County court for " glass @-@ looking " , or pretending to find lost treasure . The result of the proceeding remains unclear as primary sources report various conflicting outcomes .

While boarding at the Hale house in Harmony , Pennsylvania , Smith began courting Emma Hale . When Smith proposed marriage , Emma 's father Isaac Hale objected because Smith was " a stranger " who had no means of supporting his daughter other than money digging , of which he disapproved . Smith and Emma eloped and were married on January 18 , 1827 , after which the couple began boarding with Smith 's parents in Manchester . Later that year , when Smith promised to abandon treasure seeking , Hale offered to let the couple live on his property in Harmony and help Smith get started in business .

Smith said that he made his last annual visit to the hill on September 22 , 1827 , taking Emma with him . This time , he said he retrieved the plates and put them in a locked chest . He said the angel commanded him not to show the plates to anyone else but to publish their translation , reputed to be the religious record of early indigenous Americans who were Israelites who had come to the Americas from Jerusalem . Smith said that the plates were engraved in an unknown language , reformed Egyptian , and he told associates that he was capable of reading and translating them.No archaeological , linguistic , or other evidence of the use of Egyptian writing in ancient America has been discovered . Although Smith had left his treasure hunting company , his former associates believed he had double @-@ crossed them by taking for himself what they considered joint property . After they ransacked places where a competing treasure @-@ seer said the plates were hidden , Smith decided to leave Palmyra .

= = = Founding a church (1827 ? 30) = = =

In October 1827 , Smith and his pregnant wife moved from Palmyra to Harmony (now Oakland) , Pennsylvania , aided by money from a relatively prosperous neighbor , Martin Harris . Living near his in @-@ laws , Smith transcribed some characters that he said were engraved on the plates , and then dictated a translation to his wife .

In February 1828 , Martin Harris arrived to assist Smith by transcribing his dictation . Harris also took a sample of the characters to a few prominent scholars , including Charles Anthon , who Harris said initially authenticated the characters and their translation but then retracted his opinion after

learning that Smith was supposed to have received the plates from an angel . Anthon denied Harris 's account of the meeting , claiming instead that he had tried to convince Harris that he had been the victim of a fraud . Nevertheless , Harris returned to Harmony in April 1828 , encouraged to continue as Smith 's scribe .

Smith continued to dictate to Harris until mid @-@ June 1828 , when Harris began having doubts about the project , fueled in part by his wife 's skepticism . Harris convinced Smith to let him take the existing 116 pages of manuscript to Palmyra to show a few family members , including his wife . Harris lost the manuscript ? of which there was no other copy ? at about the same time Smith 's wife , Emma , gave birth to a son , Alvin , who died the same day . Smith said that as punishment for losing the manuscript the angel took away the plates and revoked his ability to translate . During this dark period Smith briefly attended Methodist meetings with his wife until a cousin of hers objected to inclusion of a " practicing necromancer " on the Methodist class roll .

Smith said that the angel returned the plates to him on September 22 , 1828 , and he resumed dictation in April 1829 , after he met Oliver Cowdery , who replaced Harris as his scribe . They worked full time on the manuscript between April and early June 1829 , and then moved to Fayette , New York , where they continued to work at the home of Cowdery 's friend Peter Whitmer . When the narrative described an institutional church and a requirement for baptism , Smith and Cowdery baptized each other . Dictation was completed around July 1 , 1829 .

Although Smith had previously refused to show the plates to anyone , he told Martin Harris , Oliver Cowdery , and David Whitmer that they would be allowed to see them . These men , known collectively as the Three Witnesses ? along with a later group of Eight Witnesses composed of male members of the Whitmer and Smith families ? signed statements testifying that they had seen the golden plates ; the eight witnesses also said they had actually handled the plates . According to Smith , the angel Moroni took back the plates once Smith finished using them .

The completed work , the Book of Mormon , was published in Palmyra on March 26 , 1830 , by printer E. B. Grandin , Martin Harris having mortgaged his farm to finance it . Soon after , on April 6 , 1830 , Smith and his followers formally organized the Church of Christ , and small branches were established in Palmyra , Fayette , and Colesville , New York . The Book of Mormon brought Smith regional notoriety and opposition from those who remembered his money @-@ digging and the 1826 Chenango County trial . After Cowdery baptized several new members , the Mormons received threats of mob violence ; and before Smith could confirm the newly baptized members , he was arrested and brought to trial as a disorderly person . He was acquitted , but both he and Cowdery had to flee Colesville to escape a gathering mob . In probable reference to this period of flight , Smith said that Peter , James , and John had appeared to him and had ordained him and Cowdery to a higher priesthood .

Smith 's authority was undermined when Oliver Cowdery , Hiram Page , and other church members also claimed to receive revelations . In response , Smith dictated a revelation which clarified his office as a prophet and an apostle and which declared that only he held " the keys of the mysteries , and the revelations " with the ability to inscribe scripture for the church . Shortly after the conference , Smith dispatched Cowdery , Peter Whitmer , and others on a mission to proselytize Native Americans . Cowdery was also assigned the task of locating the site of the New Jerusalem .

On their way to Missouri , Cowdery 's party passed through northeastern Ohio , where Sidney Rigdon and over a hundred followers of his variety of Campbellite Restorationism converted to Mormonism , more than doubling the size of the church . Rigdon soon visited New York and quickly became Smith 's primary assistant . With growing opposition in New York , Smith gave forth as revelation that Kirtland was the eastern boundary of the New Jerusalem and that his followers must gather there .

= = = Life in Ohio (1831 ? 38) = = =

When Smith moved to Kirtland , Ohio , in January 1831 , he encountered a religious culture that included enthusiastic demonstrations of spiritual gifts , including fits and trances , rolling on the ground , and speaking in tongues . Smith tamed these outbursts by producing two revelations that

brought the Kirtland congregation under his own authority . Rigdon 's followers had also been practicing a form of communalism , and this Smith adopted , calling it the United Order . Smith had promised church elders that in Kirtland they would receive an endowment of heavenly power , and at the June 1831 general conference , he introduced the greater authority of a High (" Melchizedek ") Priesthood to the church hierarchy .

Converts poured into Kirtland . By the summer of 1835 , there were fifteen hundred to two thousand Mormons in the vicinity , many expecting Smith to lead them shortly to the Millennial kingdom . Though the mission to the Indians had been a failure , the missionaries sent on their way by a government Indian agent , Cowdery reported that he had found the site of the New Jerusalem in Jackson County , Missouri . After Smith visited in July 1831 , he agreed , pronouncing the frontier hamlet of Independence the " center place " of Zion . Nevertheless , Rigdon disapproved , and for most of the 1830s the church remained divided between Ohio and Missouri . Smith continued to live in Ohio , but visited Missouri again in early 1832 in order to prevent a rebellion of prominent church members , including Cowdery , who believed the church in Missouri was being neglected . Smith 's trip was hastened by a mob of Ohio residents who were incensed over the United Order and Smith 's political power ; the mob beat Smith and Rigdon unconscious , tarred and feathered them , and left them for dead .

In Jackson County , Missouri residents resented the Mormon newcomers for both political and religious reasons . Tension increased until July 1833 , when non @-@ Mormons forcibly evicted the Mormons and destroyed their property . Smith advised them to bear the violence patiently until they were attacked a fourth time , after which they could fight back . After armed bands exchanged fire and one Mormon and two non @-@ Mormons were killed , the old settlers brutally expelled the Mormons from the county .

Smith ended the communitarian experiment and changed the name of the church to the " Church of Latter Day Saints " before leading a small paramilitary expedition , later called Zion 's Camp , to aid the Missouri Mormons . As a military endeavor , the expedition was a failure ; the men were outnumbered and suffered from dissension and a cholera outbreak . Nevertheless , Zion 's Camp transformed Mormon leadership , and many future church leaders came from among the participants . After the Camp returned , Smith drew heavily from its participants to establish five governing bodies in the church , all originally of equal authority to check one another ; among these five groups was a quorum of twelve apostles . Smith gave a revelation saying that to redeem Zion , his followers would have to receive an endowment in the Kirtland Temple , and in March 1836 , at the temple 's dedication , many participants in the promised endowment saw visions of angels , spoke in tongues , and prophesied .

In late 1837 , a series of internal disputes led to the collapse of the Kirtland Mormon community . Smith was blamed for having promoted a church @-@ sponsored bank that failed and accused of engaging in a sexual relationship with his serving girl , Fanny Alger . Building the temple had left the church deeply in debt , and Smith was hounded by creditors . Having heard of a large sum of money supposedly hidden in Salem , Massachusetts , Smith traveled there and received a revelation that God had " much treasure in this city " . But after a month , he returned to Kirtland empty @-@ handed .

In January 1837 , Smith and other church leaders created a joint stock company , called the Kirtland Safety Society , to act as a quasi @-@ bank . The company issued bank notes capitalized in part by real estate . Smith encouraged the Latter Day Saints to buy the notes and invested heavily in them himself , but the bank failed within a month . As a result , the Latter Day Saints in Kirtland suffered intense pressure from debt collectors and severe price volatility . Smith was held responsible for the failure , and there were widespread defections from the church , including many of Smith 's closest advisers . After a warrant was issued for Smith 's arrest on a charge of banking fraud , Smith and Rigdon fled Kirtland for Missouri on the night of January 12 , 1838 .

== = Life in Missouri (1838 ? 39) == =

By 1838 , Smith had abandoned plans to redeem Zion in Jackson County . After Smith and Rigdon

arrived in Missouri , the town of Far West became the new Mormon " Zion " . In Missouri , the church also received a new name , the " Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints " , and construction began on a new temple . In the weeks and months after Smith and Rigdon arrived at Far West , thousands of Latter Day Saints followed them from Kirtland . Smith encouraged the settlement of land outside Caldwell County , instituting a settlement in Adam @-@ ondi @-@ Ahman , in Daviess County .

During this time , a church council expelled many of the oldest and most prominent leaders of the church , including John Whitmer , David Whitmer , W. W. Phelps , and Oliver Cowdery . Smith explicitly approved of the expulsion of these men , who were known collectively as the " dissenters " .

Political and religious differences between old Missourians and newly @-@ arriving Mormon settlers provoked tensions between the two groups , much as they had years earlier in Jackson County . By this time , Smith 's experiences with mob violence led him to believe that his faith 's survival required greater militancy against anti @-@ Mormons . Around June 1838 , recent convert Sampson Avard formed a covert organization called the Danites to intimidate Mormon dissenters and oppose anti @-@ Mormon militia units . Though it is unclear how much Smith knew of the Danites ' activities , he clearly approved of those of which he did know . After Rigdon delivered a sermon that implied dissenters had no place in the Mormon community , the Danites forcibly expelled them from the county .

In an oration given at the town 's Fourth of July celebration , Rigdon declared that Mormons would no longer tolerate persecution by the Missourians and spoke of a " war of extermination " if Mormons were attacked . Smith implicitly endorsed this speech , and many non @-@ Mormons understood it to be a thinly @-@ veiled threat . They unleashed a flood of anti @-@ Mormon rhetoric in newspapers and in stump speeches given during the 1838 election campaign .

On August 6 , 1838 , non @-@ Mormons in Gallatin tried to prevent Mormons from voting , and the election @-@ day scuffles initiated the 1838 Mormon War . Non @-@ Mormon vigilantes raided and burned Mormon farms , and Danites and other Mormons pillaged non @-@ Mormon towns . During this period Smith 's heated rhetoric encouraged some of his followers to take aggressive measures Smith himself might not have approved . Under the impression that an approaching group of armed men were a band of vigilantes , Mormons attacked the Missouri state militia in what became known as the Battle of Crooked River . Governor Lilburn Boggs then ordered that the Mormons be " exterminated or driven from the state " . Even though they were yet unaware of Boggs 's order , on October 30 a party of Missourians surprised and killed seventeen Mormons in the Haun 's Mill massacre .

The following day , the Latter Day Saints surrendered to 2 @,@ 500 state troops and agreed to forfeit their property and leave the state . Smith was immediately brought before a military court , accused of treason , and sentenced to be executed the next morning ; but Alexander Doniphan , Smith 's former attorney and a brigadier general in the Missouri militia , refused to carry out the order . Smith was then sent to a state court for a preliminary hearing , where several of his former allies testified against him . Smith and five others , including Rigdon , were charged with " overt acts of treason " , and transferred to the jail at Liberty , Missouri , to await trial .

Smith 's months in prison with an ill and whining Rigdon strained their relationship . Meanwhile Brigham Young , then @-@ president of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles , rose to prominence among the Mormon faithful when he organized the move of about 14 @,@ 000 Saints to Illinois and eastern Iowa . Smith bore his imprisonment stoically . Understanding that he was effectively on trial before his own people , many of whom considered him a fallen prophet , he wrote a personal defense and an apology for the activities of the Danites . " The keys of the kingdom , " he wrote , " have not been taken away from us " . Though he directed his followers to collect and publish their stories of persecution , he also urged them to moderate their antagonism toward non @-@ Mormons . On April 6 , 1839 , after a grand jury hearing in Davis County , Smith and his companions escaped custody , almost certainly with the connivance of the sheriff and guards .

Many American newspapers criticized Missouri for the Haun 's Hill massacre and the state 's expulsion of the Latter Day Saints , and Illinois accepted Mormon refugees who gathered along the banks of the Mississippi River , where Smith purchased high @-@ priced , swampy woodland in the hamlet of Commerce . Smith also attempted to portray the Latter Day Saints as an oppressed minority and unsuccessfully petitioned the federal government for help in obtaining reparations . During the summer of 1839 , while Latter Day Saints in Nauvoo suffered from a malaria epidemic , Smith sent Brigham Young and other apostles to missions in Europe , where they made numerous converts , many of them poor factory workers .

Smith also attracted a few wealthy and influential converts , including John C. Bennett , the Illinois quartermaster general . Bennett used his connections in the Illinois legislature to obtain an unusually liberal charter for the new city , which Smith named " Nauvoo " (Hebrew ??????? , meaning " to be beautiful ") . The charter granted the city virtual autonomy , authorized a university , and granted Nauvoo habeas corpus power ? which allowed Smith to fend off extradition to Missouri . Though Mormon authorities controlled Nauvoo 's civil government , the city promised an unusually liberal guarantee of religious freedom . The charter also authorized the Nauvoo Legion , an autonomous militia whose actions were limited only by state and federal constitutions . " Lieutenant General " Smith and " Major General " Bennett became its commanders , thereby controlling by far the largest body of armed men in Illinois . Smith made Bennett Assistant President of the church , and Bennett was elected Nauvoo 's first mayor . In 1841 , Smith began revealing the doctrine of plural marriage to a few of his closest male associates , including Bennett , who used it as an excuse to seduce numerous women wed and unwed . When embarrassing rumors of " spiritual wifery " got abroad , Smith forced Bennett 's resignation as Nauvoo mayor . In retaliation , Bennett wrote " lurid exposés of life in Nauvoo " .

The early Nauvoo years were a period of doctrinal innovation . Smith introduced baptism for the dead in 1840 , and in 1841 , construction began on the Nauvoo Temple as a place for recovering lost ancient knowledge . An 1841 revelation promised the restoration of the " fulness of the priesthood " ; and in May 1842 , Smith inaugurated a revised endowment or " first anointing " . The endowment resembled rites of freemasonry that Smith had observed two months earlier when he had been initiated into the Nauvoo Masonic lodge . At first , the endowment was open only to men , who were initiated into the Anointed Quorum . For women , Smith introduced the Relief Society , a service club and sorority within which Smith predicted women would receive " the keys of the kingdom " . Smith also elaborated on his plan for a millennial kingdom . No longer envisioning the building of Zion in Nauvoo , Smith viewed Zion as encompassing all of North and South America , with Mormon settlements being " stakes " of Zion 's metaphorical tent . Zion also became less a refuge from an impending tribulation than a great building project . In the summer of 1842 , Smith revealed a plan to establish the millennial Kingdom of God , which would eventually establish theocratic rule over the whole earth .

By mid @-@ 1842 , popular opinion had turned against the Mormons . After an unknown assailant shot and wounded Missouri governor Lilburn Boggs in May 1842 , anti @-@ Mormons circulated rumors that Smith 's bodyguard , Porter Rockwell , was the shooter . Though the evidence was circumstantial , Boggs ordered Smith 's extradition . Certain he would be killed if he ever returned to Missouri , Smith went into hiding twice during the next five months before the U.S. district attorney for Illinois argued that Smith 's extradition to Missouri would be unconstitutional . (Rockwell was later tried and acquitted .) In June 1843 , enemies of Smith convinced a reluctant Illinois Governor Thomas Ford to extradite Smith to Missouri on the old charge of treason . Two law officers arrested Smith , but were intercepted by a party of Mormons before they could reach Missouri . Smith was then released on a writ of habeas corpus from the Nauvoo municipal court . While this ended the Missourians ' attempts at extradition , it caused significant political fallout in Illinois .

In December 1843 , Smith petitioned Congress to make Nauvoo an independent territory with the right to call out federal troops in its defense . Smith then wrote to the leading presidential candidates and asked them what they would do to protect the Mormons . After receiving noncommittal or negative responses , Smith announced his own third @-@ party candidacy for President of the

United States , suspended regular proselytizing , and sent out the Quorum of the Twelve and hundreds of other political missionaries . In March 1844 , following a dispute with a federal bureaucrat , Smith organized the secret Council of Fifty with authority to decide which national or state laws Mormons should obey . The Council was also to select a site for a large Mormon settlement in Texas , California , or Oregon , where Mormons could live under theocratic law beyond other governmental control .

= = = Death = = =

By the spring of 1844 , a rift developed between Smith and a half dozen of his closest associates . Most notably , William Law , Smith 's trusted counselor , and Robert Foster , a general of the Nauvoo Legion , disagreed with Smith about how to manage Nauvoo 's economy . Both also said that Smith had proposed marriage to their wives . Believing the dissidents were plotting against his life , Smith excommunicated them on April 18 , 1844 . These dissidents formed a competing church and the following month , at Carthage , the county seat , they procured indictments against Smith for perjury and polygamy .

On June 7 , the dissidents published the first (and only) issue of the Nauvoo Expositor , calling for reform within the church and appealing to the political views of the county 's anti @-@ Mormons . The paper decried Smith 's new " doctrines of many Gods " , alluded to Smith 's theocratic aspirations , and called for a repeal of the Nauvoo city charter . It also attacked Smith 's practice of polygamy , implying that Smith was using religion as a pretext to draw unassuming women to Nauvoo in order to seduce and marry them .

Fearing the newspaper would bring the countryside down on the Mormons , the Nauvoo city council declared the Expositor a public nuisance and ordered the Nauvoo Legion to destroy the press . Smith , who feared another mob attack , supported the action , not realizing that suppression of the press would sooner incite an attack than libel would .

Destruction of the newspaper provoked a strident call to arms from Thomas C. Sharp , editor of the Warsaw Signal and longtime critic of Smith . Fearing an uprising , Smith mobilized the Nauvoo Legion on June 18 and declared martial law . Officials in Carthage responded by mobilizing their small detachment of the state militia , and Governor Thomas Ford appeared , threatening to raise a larger militia unless Smith and the Nauvoo city council surrendered themselves . Smith initially fled across the Mississippi River , but shortly returned and surrendered to Ford . On June 23 , Smith and his brother Hyrum rode to Carthage to stand trial for inciting a riot . Once the Smiths were in custody , the charges were increased to treason .

On June 27 , 1844 , an armed mob with blackened faces stormed Carthage Jail where Joseph and Hyrum were being held . Hyrum , who was trying to secure the door , was killed instantly with a shot to the face . Smith fired a pepper @-@ box pistol that a friend had lent him for self @-@ defense , then sprang for the window . He was shot multiple times before falling out the window , crying , " Oh Lord my God ! " He died shortly after hitting the ground , but was shot several times more before the mob dispersed . Five men were later tried for his murder , but all were acquitted . Smith was buried in Nauvoo , and is currently interred there at the Smith Family Cemetery .

Throughout his life Smith had been sharply criticized by newspaper editors , and after his death newspapers were almost unanimous in portraying Smith as a religious fanatic . Conversely , within Mormonism , Smith was memorialized first and foremost as a prophet , martyred to seal the testimony of his faith .

= = Legacy = =

= = = Impact = = =

Smith attracted thousands of devoted followers before his death in 1844 and millions in the century that followed . Among Mormons , he is regarded as a prophet on par with Moses and Elijah . In a

2015 compilation of the 100 Most Significant Americans of All Time , Smithsonian magazine ranked Smith first in the category of religious figures .

Mormons and ex @-@ Mormons have produced a large amount of scholarly work about Smith , and to a large extent the result has been two discordant pictures of very different people : a man of God on the one hand , and on the other , a fraud preying on the ignorance of his followers . Believers tended to focus on his achievements and religious teachings , deemphasizing his personal defects , while detractors focused on his mistakes , legal troubles , and controversial doctrines . During the first half of the 20th century , some writers suggested that Smith might have suffered from epileptic seizures or from psychological disorders such as paranoid delusions or manic @-@ depressive illness that might explain his visions and revelations . Many modern biographers disagree with these ideas . More nuanced interpretations range from viewing Smith as a prophet who had normal human weaknesses , a " pious fraud " who believed he was called of God to preach repentance and felt justified inventing visions in order to convert people , or a gifted " mythmaker " who was the product of his Yankee environment . Biographers , Mormon and non @-@ Mormon , agree that Smith was one of the most influential , charismatic , and innovative figures in American religious history .

Memorials to Smith include the Joseph Smith Memorial Building in Salt Lake City , Utah , the Joseph Smith Building on the campus of Brigham Young University , and a granite obelisk marking his birth place .

= = = Religious denominations = = =

Smith 's death resulted in a succession crisis . Smith had proposed several ways to choose his successor , but had never clarified his preference . Smith 's brother Hyrum , had he survived , would have had the strongest claim , followed by Smith 's brother Samuel , who died mysteriously a month after his brothers . Another brother , William , was unable to attract a sufficient following . Smith 's sons Joseph III and David also had claims , but Joseph III was too young and David was yet unborn . The Council of Fifty had a theoretical claim to succession , but it was a secret organization . Some of Smith 's chosen successors , such as Oliver Cowdery and David Whitmer , had left the church .

The two strongest succession candidates were Brigham Young , senior member and president of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles , and Sidney Rigdon , the senior member of the First Presidency . In a church @-@ wide conference on August 8 , most of the Latter Day Saints elected Young , who led them to the Utah Territory as The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter @-@ day Saints (LDS Church) . Membership in Young 's denomination surpassed 14 million members in 2010 . Smaller groups followed Sidney Rigdon and James J. Strang , who had based his claim on an allegedly @-@ forged letter of appointment . Others followed Lyman Wight and Alpheus Cutler . Many members of these smaller groups , including most of Smith 's family , eventually coalesced in 1860 under the leadership of Joseph Smith III and formed what was known for more than a century as the Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints (now Community of Christ) , which now has about 250 @,@ 000 members . As of 2013 , members of the denominations originating from Smith 's teachings number approximately 15 million .

= = Family and descendants = =

The first of Smith 's wives , Emma Hale , gave birth to nine children during their marriage , five of whom died before the age of two . The eldest , Alvin (born in 1828) , died within hours of birth , as did twins Thaddeus and Louisa (born in 1831) . When the twins died , the Smiths adopted another set of twins , Julia and Joseph , whose mother had recently died in childbirth ; Joseph died of measles in 1832 . In 1841 , Don Carlos , who had been born a year earlier , died of malaria . In 1842 , Emma gave birth to a stillborn son . Joseph and Emma had four sons who lived to maturity : Joseph Smith III , Frederick Granger Williams Smith , Alexander Hale Smith , and David Hyrum Smith (born in 1844 after Smith 's death) . As of 2013 , DNA testing had provided no evidence that Smith had fathered any children by women other than Emma .

Throughout her life , Emma Smith frequently denied that her husband had ever taken additional wives . Emma said that the very first time she ever became aware of a polygamy revelation being attributed to Smith by Mormons was when she read about it in Orson Pratt 's periodical The Seer in 1853 . Emma campaigned publicly against polygamy , and was the main signatory of a petition in 1842 , with a thousand female signatures , denying that Smith was connected with polygamy . As president of the Ladies ' Relief Society , Emma authorized publishing a certificate in the same year denouncing polygamy , and denying her husband as its creator or participant . Even on her deathbed , Emma denied Joseph 's involvement with polygamy , stating , " No such thing as polygamy , or spiritual wifery , was taught , publicly or privately , before my husband 's death , that I have now , or ever had any knowledge of ... He had no other wife but me ; nor did he to my knowledge ever have " .

After Smith 's death , Emma Smith quickly became alienated from Brigham Young and the church leadership . Young , whom Emma feared and despised , was suspicious of her desire to preserve the family 's assets from inclusion with those of the church , and thought she would be even more troublesome because she openly opposed plural marriage . When most Latter Day Saints moved west , she stayed in Nauvoo , married a non @-@ Mormon , Major Lewis C. Bidamon , and withdrew from religion until 1860 , when she affiliated with the Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints , first headed by her son , Joseph Smith III . Emma never denied Smith 's prophetic gift or repudiated her belief in the authenticity of the Book of Mormon .

= = Revelations = =

According to Richard Bushman , the " signal feature " of Smith 's life was " his sense of being guided by revelation " . Instead of presenting ideas with logical arguments , Smith dictated authoritative revelations and let people decide whether to believe . Smith 's teachings came primarily through his revelations , which read like scripture : oracular and open to interpretation . Smith and his followers viewed his revelations as being above teachings or opinions , and Smith 's actions seemed to indicate that he believed in his revelations as much as his most loyal followers .

Smith 's first recorded revelation was a rebuke from God for having let Martin Harris lose 116 pages of Book of Mormon manuscript , chastising him for " fearing man more than God " . The revelation was given in the voice of God rather than as a declaration mediated through Smith ; and subsequent revelations assumed a similar authoritative style , often opening with words such as " Hearken O ye people which profess my name , saith the Lord your God . "

= = = Book of Mormon = = =

The Book of Mormon has been called the longest and most complex of Smith 's revelations . It is organized as a compilation of smaller books , each named after its main named narrator or a prominent leader . It tells the story of the rise and fall of a religious civilization beginning around 600 BC and ending in 421 AD . The story begins with a family that leaves Jerusalem , just before the Babylonian captivity . They eventually construct a ship and sail to a " promised land " in the Western Hemisphere . There , they are divided into two factions : Nephites and Lamanites . The Nephites become a righteous people who build a temple and live the law of Moses , though their prophets teach a Christian gospel . The book explains itself to be largely the work of Mormon , a Nephite prophet and military figure . The book closes when Mormon 's son , Moroni , finishes engraving and buries the records written on the golden plates .

Christian themes permeate the work ; for instance , Nephite prophets in the Book of Mormon teach of Christ 's coming , and talk of the star that will appear at his birth . After the crucifixion and resurrection in Jerusalem , Jesus appears in the Americas , repeats the Sermon on the Mount , blesses children , and appoints twelve disciples . The book ends with Moroni 's exhortation to " come unto Christ " .

Early Mormons understood the Book of Mormon to be a religious history of the indigenous peoples of the Americas . Smith 's followers view it as a companion to the Bible and an additional witness of

Christ , akin to a large apocryphal work . Modern historian Fawn Brodie has called the Book of Mormon a response to pressing cultural and environmental issues of Smith 's times , saying that Smith composed the Book of Mormon drawing from scraps of information available to him ; Dan Vogel , another historian , says that the work is autobiographical in nature .

Smith never said how he produced the Book of Mormon , saying only that he translated by the power of God and implying that he had transcribed the words . The Book of Mormon itself states only that its text will " come forth by the gift and power of God unto the interpretation thereof " . As such , considerable disagreement about the actual method used exists . For at least some of the earliest dictation , Smith is said to have used the " Urim and Thummim " , a pair of seer stones he said were buried with the plates . Later , however , he is said to have used a chocolate @-@ colored stone he had found in 1822 that he had used previously for treasure hunting . Joseph Knight said that Smith saw the words of the translation while he gazed at the stone or stones in the bottom of his hat , excluding all light , a process similar to divining the location of treasure . Sometimes , Smith concealed the process by raising a curtain or dictating from another room , while at other times he dictated in full view of witnesses while the plates lay covered on the table . After completing the translation , Smith gave the brown stone to Cowdery , but continued to receive revelations using another stone until about 1833 when he said he no longer needed it .

Although the Book of Mormon drew many converts to the church , Fawn Brodie argued in 1945 that the " book lives today because of the prophet , not he because of the book . " Smith had assumed a role as prophet , seer , and apostle of Jesus Christ , and by early 1831 , he was introducing himself as " Joseph the Prophet " . The language of authority in Smith 's revelations was appealing to converts , and the revelations were given with the confidence of an Old Testament prophet .

= = = Moses and Abraham = = =

Smith said that in June 1830 , he received a " revelation of Moses " in which Moses saw " the world and the ends thereof " and asked God questions about the purpose of creation and man 's relationship to God . This revelation initiated a revision of the Bible on which Smith worked sporadically until 1833 and which remained unpublished at his death . Smith said that he believed the Bible had been corrupted through the ages , and that his revision worked to restore the original intent ; it added long passages rewritten " according to his inspiration " . While many changes involved straightening out seeming contradictions or making small clarifications , other changes added large " lost " portions to the text . For instance , Smith 's revision nearly tripled the length of the first five chapters of Genesis in what would become the Book of Moses .

The Book of Moses begins with Moses ' inquiring of God as to the purpose of creation , and is told in this account that God made the earth and heavens to bring humans to eternal life . The book also provides an enlarged account of the Genesis creation narrative and expands the story of Enoch , the ancestor of Noah . In the narrative , Enoch speaks with God , receives a prophetic calling , and eventually builds a city of Zion so righteous that it was taken to heaven . The book also elaborates and expands upon foreshadowing and " types " of Christ , in effect Christianizing the Old Testament .

In 1835 Smith encouraged some Latter Day Saints in Kirtland to purchase rolls of ancient Egyptian papyri from a traveling exhibitor . Over the next several years , Smith worked off and on as events allowed , to produce a supposed translation of one of these rolls , which he published in 1842 as the Book of Abraham . The Book of Abraham speaks of the founding of the Abrahamic nation , astronomy , cosmology , lineage and priesthood , and gave another account of the creation story . The papyri from which Smith dictated the Book of Abraham were thought to have been lost in the Great Chicago Fire , but several fragments were rediscovered in the 1960s , were translated by Egyptologists , and were determined to be part of the Book of the Dead with no connection to Abraham .

= = = Other revelations = = =

According to Parley P. Pratt , Smith dictated revelations orally , and they were recorded by a scribe without revisions or corrections . Revelations were immediately copied , and then circulated among church members . Smith 's revelations often came in response to specific questions . He described the revelatory process as having " pure Intelligence " flowing into him . Smith , however , never viewed the wording to be infallible . The revelations were not God 's words verbatim , but " couched in language suitable to Joseph 's time " . In 1833 Smith edited and expanded many of the previous revelations , publishing them as the Book of Commandments , which later became part of the Doctrine and Covenants .

Smith gave varying types of revelations . Some were temporal , while others were spiritual or doctrinal ; some were received for a specific individual , while others were directed at the whole church . Notable revelations include an 1831 revelation called " The Law " containing directions for missionary work , rules for organizing society in Zion , a reiteration of the Ten Commandments , an injunction to " administer to the poor and needy " , and an outline for the law of consecration . An 1832 revelation called " The Vision " added to the fundamentals of sin and atonement , introduced doctrines of life after salvation , the theme of exaltation , and a heaven with degrees of glory . Another 1832 revelation " on Priesthood " was the first to explain priesthood doctrine . Three months later , Smith gave a lengthy revelation called the " Olive Leaf " containing themes of cosmology and eschatology , and discussing subjects such as light , truth , intelligence , and sanctification ; a related revelation given in 1833 put Christ at the center of salvation .

Also in 1833 , at a time of temperance agitation , Smith delivered a revelation called the " Word of Wisdom , " which counseled a diet of wholesome herbs , fruits , grains , a sparing use of meat , and recommended that Latter Day Saints avoid " strong " alcoholic drinks , tobacco , and " hot drinks " (later interpreted to mean tea and coffee) . The Word of Wisdom was not originally framed as a commandment , but a recommendation . As such , Smith and other Latter Day Saints did not strictly follow this counsel , though it later became a requirement in the LDS Church . In 1835 Smith gave the " great revelation " that organized the priesthood into quorums and councils , and served as a complex blueprint for church structure . Smith 's last revelation on the " New and Everlasting Covenant " was recorded in 1843 , and dealt with the theology of family , the doctrine of sealing , and plural marriage .

Before 1832 , most of Smith 's revelations dealt with establishing the church , gathering his followers , and building the City of Zion , while later revelations dealt with the priesthood , endowment , and exaltation . The revelations slowed in Kirtland during the autumn of 1833 , and again after the dedication of the Kirtland Temple , as Smith relied more heavily on his own teachings . Smith moved away from written revelations opening with " verily thus saith the Lord " and taught more in sermons , conversations , and letters . For instance , the doctrines of baptism for the dead and the nature of God were introduced in sermons , and one of Smith 's most famed statements about there being " no such thing as immaterial matter " was recorded from a casual conversation with a Methodist preacher .

= = Views and teachings = =

= = = Cosmology and theology = = =

Smith taught that all existence was material , including a world of " spirit matter " so fine that it was invisible to all but the purest mortal eyes . Matter , in Smith 's view , could neither be created nor destroyed ; the creation involved only the reorganization of existing matter . Like matter , Smith saw " intelligence " as co @-@ eternal with God , and taught that human spirits had been drawn from a pre @-@ existent pool of eternal intelligences . Nevertheless , spirits could not experience a " fullness of joy " unless joined with corporeal bodies , according to Smith . The work and glory of God , then , was to create worlds across the cosmos where inferior intelligences could be embodied .

Though Smith initially viewed God the Father as a spirit , he eventually began teaching that God was an advanced and glorified man , embodied within time and space . By the end of his life , Smith

was teaching that both God the Father and Jesus were distinct beings with physical bodies , but the Holy Spirit was a " personage of Spirit " . Through the gradual acquisition of knowledge , according to Smith , those who received exaltation could eventually become like God . These teachings implied a vast hierarchy of gods , with God himself having a father . In Smith 's cosmology , those who became gods would reign , unified in purpose and will , leading spirits of lesser capacity to share immortality and eternal life .

In Smith 's view , the opportunity to achieve exaltation extended to all humanity ; those who died with no opportunity to accept saving ordinances could achieve exaltation by accepting them in the afterlife through ordinances performed on their behalf . Smith said that children who died in their innocence would be guaranteed to rise at the resurrection and receive exaltation . Apart from those who committed the eternal sin , Smith taught that even the wicked and disbelieving would achieve a degree of glory in the afterlife .

= = = Religious authority and ritual = = =

Smith 's teachings were rooted in dispensational restorationism . He taught that the Church of Christ restored through him was a latter @-@ day restoration of the early Christian faith , which had been lost in the Great Apostasy . At first , Smith 's church had little sense of hierarchy ; his religious authority was derived from visions and revelations . Though Smith did not claim exclusive prophethood , an early revelation designated him as the only prophet allowed to issue commandments " as Moses " . This religious authority encompassed economic and political as well as spiritual matters . For instance , in the early 1830s , he temporarily instituted a form of religious communism , called the United Order , that required Latter Day Saints to give all their property to the church , which was divided among the faithful . He also envisioned that the theocratic institutions he established would have a role in the worldwide political organization of the Millennium .

By the mid @-@ 1830s , Smith began teaching a hierarchy of three priesthoods ? the Melchizedek , the Aaronic , and the Patriarchal . Each priesthood was a continuation of biblical priesthoods through patrilineal succession or ordination by biblical figures appearing in visions . Upon introducing the Melchizedek or " High " Priesthood in 1831 , Smith taught that its recipients would be " endowed with power from on high " , thus fulfilling a need for a greater holiness and an authority commensurate with the New Testament apostles . This doctrine of endowment evolved through the 1830s , until in 1842 , the Nauvoo endowment included an elaborate ceremony containing elements similar to Freemasonry and the Jewish tradition of Kabbalah . The endowment was extended to women in 1843 , though Smith never clarified whether women could be ordained to priesthood offices .

Smith taught that the High Priesthood 's endowment of heavenly power included the sealing powers of Elijah , allowing High Priests to effect binding consequences in the afterlife . For example , this power would enable proxy baptisms for the dead and priesthood marriages that would be effective into the afterlife . Elijah 's sealing powers also enabled the second anointing , or " fulness [sic] of the priesthood " , which , according to Smith , sealed married couples to their exaltation .

= = = Theology of family = = =

During the early 1840s , Smith unfolded a theology of family relations called the " New and Everlasting Covenant " that superseded all earthly bonds . He taught that outside the Covenant , marriages were simply matters of contract , and that in the afterlife individuals married outside the Covenant or not married would be limited in their progression . To fully enter the Covenant , a man and woman must participate in a " first anointing " , a " sealing " ceremony , and a " second anointing " (also called " sealing by the Holy Spirit of Promise ") . When fully sealed into the Covenant , Smith said that no sin nor blasphemy (other than the eternal sin) could keep them from their exaltation in the afterlife . According to Smith , only one person on earth at a time ? in this case , Smith ? could possess this power of sealing .

Smith taught that the highest level of exaltation could be achieved through " plural marriage " (

polygamy) , which was the ultimate manifestation of this New and Everlasting Covenant . Plural marriage , according to Smith , allowed an individual to transcend the angelic state and become a god , accelerating the expansion of one 's heavenly kingdom .

== Polygamy ==

Smith had by some accounts been teaching a polygamy doctrine as early as 1831 , and there is unconfirmed evidence that Smith was a polygamist by 1835 . Although the church had publicly repudiated polygamy , in 1837 there was a rift between Smith and Oliver Cowdery over the issue . Cowdery suspected that Smith had engaged in a relationship with his serving girl Fanny Alger . Smith never denied a relationship , but insisted it was not adulterous , presumably because he had taken Alger as a plural wife .

In April 1841 , Smith wed Louisa Beaman ; and during the next two @-@ and @-@ a @-@ half years he married or was sealed to about 30 additional women , ten of whom were already married to other men (this was generally done with the knowledge and consent of their husbands , and the records and circumstances of several of these unions support that they may have been considered " eternity @-@ only " sealings) . Ten of Smith 's plural wives were between the ages of fourteen and twenty ; others were over fifty . The practice of polygamy was kept secret from both non @-@ Mormons and most members of the church .

Polygamy caused a breach between Smith and his first wife , Emma . Although Emma knew of some of her husband 's marriages , she almost certainly did not know the extent of his polygamous activities . In 1843 , Emma temporarily accepted Smith 's marriage to four women boarded in the Smith household , but she soon regretted her decision and demanded that the other wives leave . In July , Smith dictated a revelation directing Emma to accept plural marriage , but the two were not reconciled until September , after Emma began participating in temple ceremonies .

== Political views ==

While campaigning for President of the United States in 1844 , Smith had opportunity to take political positions on issues of the day . Smith considered the U.S. Constitution , and especially the Bill of Rights , to be inspired by God and " the [Latter Day] Saints ' best and perhaps only defense . " . He believed a strong central government was crucial to the nation 's well @-@ being and thought democracy better than tyranny ? although he also taught that a theocratic monarchy was the ideal form of government . In foreign affairs , Smith was an expansionist , though he viewed " expansionism as brotherhood " .

Smith favored a strong central bank and high tariffs to protect American business and agriculture . He disfavored imprisonment of convicts except for murder , preferring efforts to reform criminals through labor ; he also opposed courts @-@ martial for military deserters . He supported capital punishment but opposed hanging , preferring execution by firing squad or beheading .

Smith published a pro @-@ slavery essay in 1836 but later opposed the practice . During his presidential campaign , he proposed abolishing it by 1850 and compensating slaveholders through sale of public lands . Smith said he did not believe blacks to be inherently inferior to whites ; he welcomed both freemen and slaves into the church . However , he opposed baptizing slaves without permission of their masters , and he opposed miscegenation .

Smith declared that he would be one of the instruments in fulfilling Nebuchadnezzar 's statue vision in the Book of Daniel : that secular government would be destroyed without " sword or gun " , and would be replaced with a " theodemocratic " Kingdom of God . Smith taught that this kingdom would be governed by theocratic principles , but that it would also be multid denominational and democratic , so long as the people chose wisely .

== Ethics and behavior ==

A succinct statement of ethics by Smith is found in his 13th Article of Faith :

We believe in being honest , true , chaste , benevolent , virtuous , and in doing good to all men ; indeed , we may say that we follow the admonition of Paul ? We believe all things , we hope all things , we have endured many things , and hope to be able to endure all things . If there is anything virtuous , lovely , or of good report or praiseworthy , we seek after these things .

Smith said his ethical rule was , " When the Lord commands , do it " .

He also taught :

that which is wrong under one circumstance , may be and often is , right under another . God said thou shalt not kill ? at another time he said thou shalt utterly destroy . This is the principle on which the government of heaven is conducted ? by revelation adapted to the circumstances in which the elders of the kingdom are placed . Whatever God requires is right ... even things which may be considered abominable to all those who do not understand the order of heaven .

Beginning in the mid @-@ 1830s and into the 1840s , as the Mormon people became involved in conflicts with the Missouri and Illinois state governments , Smith taught that " Congress has no power to make a law that would abridge the rights of my religion , " and that they were not under the obligation to follow laws they deemed as being contrary to their " religious privilege " . Smith may have thus felt justified in promoting polygamy despite its violation of some traditional ethical standards .