Jedediah and Heber Grant

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On December 1, 1856, Elder Wilford Woodruff and Elder Franklin D. Richards left the Church historian’s office for the home of Jedediah Grant, less than a block away. The hour was late, about 10:30 in the evening. It had snowed several inches during the day, and the weather was turning cold.

For over a week Elder Woodruff had maintained a vigil at his friend’s adobe home, constantly praying and blessing Jedediah’s weakened body. Now he learned that there would be no recovery. Before arriving at their destination, the two Apostles heard the dreaded news: Jedediah Morgan Grant—one of President Young’s counselors and the mayor of Salt Lake City—was dead. “Lung disease,” a combination of typhoid and pneumonia, had taken him at the early age of forty.

Elders Woodruff and Richards hastened their steps. They found the Grant household on Main Street in distress. Jedediah’s wives and children were “weeping bitterly.” They had lost a kind husband and father but also their provider in Utah’s young and still uncertain society. Less than ten years had elapsed since Brother Brigham and the others had first entered the Salt Lake Valley. This year, 1856, had been especially hard. Indian turmoil, handcart tragedies, and bad crops had plagued the Saints. Now there was Jedediah’s death.

Upstairs, concealed from the view of the Apostles, lay another grieving woman. Only nine days before, Rachel Grant had borne her husband a son—her first child. Her labor had been difficult, and for a time her attendants feared for her life. At the moment of Jedediah’s...
death, she remained bedridden, recovering her strength. The commotion downstairs must have set her thinking. She had left her home in New Jersey for the gospel’s sake. Jedediah had not been a wealthy man. What might her future be? What would become of her son?

On that dark, troubled night, no one could have guessed the answers to her questions.

Jedediah Grant—the Beginning

Both Joshua Grant and Athalia Howard, Jedediah’s father and mother, came from families that had farmed Connecticut’s stony soil for at least four generations. They married in Sullivan County, New York, and then frequently uprooted their growing household in a steady westward migration. When the Latter-day Saint missionaries found the Grants, Joshua and Athalia had twelve children. “Jeddy,” as he was usually known, was their seventh (illus. 1-1).

Like many early converts, the family embraced the gospel after a dramatic spiritual experience. During winter 1833, Elders Amasa Lyman and Orson Hyde came to the Grant family home near Erie, Pennsylvania. Athalia lay paralyzed with rheumatism. “I remember how tall Elder Lyman looked as he stood by the side of Mother’s bed telling us of the gifts and blessings of the restored Gospel and that these blessings follow the believer,” a daughter recalled many years later.

My mother asked why she could not be blessed as she had perfect faith that God could heal her. The elders placed their hands on her head and prayed for her recovery. Later that evening my mother got up, dressed herself, went out of doors and climbed the stairs, which were on the outside of the house and, with my help, prepared a bed in which the elders slept that night.2

2 BYU Studies Quarterly, Vol. 43, Iss. 1 [2004], Art. 4

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By March 2, 1833, seventeen-year-old Jeddy had seen and heard enough to desire baptism. The weather was not accommodating, but Jeddy was determined. The winter temperature was so biting that the young man’s clothing froze to his body after he came up out of the river. Eventually most of the family, parents as well as children, followed him into the new faith.

At first glance Jeddy seemed to offer little promise. “He was a frontier boy,” his biographer wrote, “one whose hopes went no further than the wrinkled face of his father and the earthy struggle for life into which he was born.” His nose, broken early in life, descended properly to its bridge and then angled noticeably to the left. His sinuous frame looked fragile, almost delicate.

But there was more here than met the eye. Frontier schooling gave him only a shaky command of commas, periods, and the perplexing science of orthography; yet as a teenager he ambitiously read from such religious and philosophical thinkers as Wesley, Locke, Rousseau, Watts, Abercrombie, and Mather. And he early learned to make his slender body respond to his commands. Young Jeddy could fell large trees single-handedly and more than keep pace in his father’s shingle making business. He had intelligence, willpower, and a flood of nervous energy.

Mormonism completely captivated him, and he enthusiastically responded to its calls. A year after his baptism, he marched with Zion’s Camp to Missouri. Winter 1835–36 found him working on the Kirtland Temple. At nineteen he began the first of four proselyting missions, which largely occupied the years 1835 through 1842. In 1843 he received the appointment of Presiding Elder of the Philadelphia Branch and a year later became a member of the First Council of Seventy and of Joseph Smith’s General Council at Nauvoo.

He found his talents multiplying. During his long missionary tours in the Virginia and Carolina back country, Jeddy’s wit and eloquence won scores of converts—and a preaching reputation that became a local legend. He also earned high marks for loyalty and leadership. “I think he has saved the church in Philadelphia,” Wilford Woodruff wrote as dissension swept many of the eastern branches following Joseph Smith’s death. “Elder Grant is a man after my own heart. He is true in all things.” Likewise during the 1847 migration to Utah, Jedediah was given responsibility. He
captained the “Third Hundred” pioneers across the plains and into the valley.

Only two members of his father’s family permanently followed Jedediah to the West. The rough-hewn George D. distinguished himself as a scout and militiaman; Grantsville, Utah, was named in his honor following an Indian skirmish. Joshua Jr., Jeddy’s frequent missionary companion, settled in Salt Lake City, where he died in 1851. However, the remainder of the family stayed behind. Jedediah’s parents had “gathered” at Kirtland and later in Far West, but for them the Missouri persecutions were a searing experience. Joshua and Athalia eventually located near Altona, Knox County, Illinois, about sixty miles northeast of Nauvoo. Removed from the Saints, their faith in the gospel gradually withered.

Jedediah’s other brothers and sisters followed a similar pattern. Some drifted into Universalism. Two sisters successively married William Smith, brother of the Prophet. Several accepted the reorganized church’s doctrines of Joseph Smith III. When one of Jeddy’s sons many years later visited his aging aunts and uncles in the Midwest, he found them to be “good people,” but no different in attainments and character than the folk that surrounded them.

Rachel Ivins

Rachel Ivins met the dramatic, twenty-three-year-old Jedediah Grant when she was about eighteen. She was the sixth of eight children born to Caleb Ivins and Edith Ridgeway. Both parents had died before she was ten, and Rachel was then raised by a succession of relatives.

The Ivins and Ridgeways were similar—serious-minded merchants who had migrated to America in the late seventeenth century. Rachel’s relatives generously filled her childhood wants and instilled within her the virtues of hard work, neatness, discipline, and Christian kindness.

However, Rachel had trouble accepting her family’s Quaker seriousness. She saw herself as “religiously inclined but not of the long-faced variety.” Moreover, she liked to sing. While living with a straight-laced cousin who banned music from his home, the orphan would steal off to a small grove of trees where she sang as she sewed for her dolls.
When Rachel first heard Jedediah Grant and Erastus Snow teach the restored gospel, she wondered if these might be the “false prophets” that the Bible spoke of. She returned home after one Mormon preaching session, knelt down, and pleaded for the Lord’s forgiveness for deliberately listening to false doctrine on the Sabbath. But more searching prayer and study convinced her otherwise. In 1840 she was baptized, and two years later, with relatives who also had accepted the faith, she traveled to Nauvoo.

The well-bred Rachel Ivins, just twenty-one, must have turned more than one head during her Nauvoo visit. A friend later described her:

She was dressed in silk with a handsome lace collar, or fichu, and an elegant shawl over her shoulder, and a long white lace veil thrown back over her simple straw bonnet. She carried an elaborate feather fan. . . . One could easily discern the subdued Quaker pride in her method of using it, for Sister Rachel had the air, the tone, and mannerisms of the Quakers.

Actually Rachel stayed longer in Nauvoo than she planned. She witnessed the kaleidoscopic last days of Joseph and Hyrum Smith and was present when Brigham Young spoke with the voice and mannerisms of his predecessor. This last event long remained a testimony to her. Some of her Ivins cousins were a part of the Nauvoo Expositor intrigue, which eventually led to Joseph’s death, and they later strayed into James J. Strang’s apostasy. Rachel herself did not doubt where the Lord's authority lay. She had seen Joseph’s mantle fall upon Brigham.

Rachel did not follow the Saints westward at first but instead returned to New Jersey. However, by spring 1853 she joined a company of New Jersey Saints in their migration west. Doctors warned that the journey might turn a persistent cough into something dangerous; her family had a medical history of “consumption,” or tuberculosis. Most of Rachel’s relatives also attempted to dissuade her. They even offered her a lifetime annuity if she would remain.

When the New Jersey pioneers arrived in Salt Lake City, they turned up Main Street and found lodging with their old friend Jedediah Grant. He had retained ties with his New Jersey flock and had returned several times to his old missionary area to determine their welfare.
Qualities That Count

Rachel would return to Jedediah’s adobe house a little more than a year later, this time as his seventh and last wife.

Jedediah Grant’s Children—the Second Generation

From the beginning, Rachel’s young son seemed a child of promise. When Bishop Edwin Woolley christened him “Heber Jede Ivins Grant,” the spirit of the occasion was unusual. “I was only an instrument in the hands of his dead father . . . in blessing him,” Bishop Woolley later remarked. Heber Grant “is entitled to be one of the Apostles, and I know it.”

However, the childhood of Heber Jeddy Grant, time quickly shortened his name, was not an easy one. After the death of Jedediah, Rachel briefly married his brother George D. Grant. Their divorce left her again impoverished.

Heber later looked back upon his youth. There were blustery nights with no fire in the hearth, months with no shoes, never more than a single homemade outfit of homespun at a time, and except for an adequate supply of bread, a meager fare which allowed only a pound of butter and not many more pounds of sugar for an entire year. Although Rachel’s education, personality, and intelligence placed her among Deseret’s “first ladies,” sewing became her means of avoiding charity. “I sat on the floor at night until midnight,” Heber remembered of many evenings, “and pumped the sewing machine to relieve her tired limbs.” The machine’s constantly moving treadles became a symbol of the Grant family’s stubborn independence.

Young Heber J. Grant quickly displayed his talents in a remarkable fashion. At the age of fifteen, he joined the insurance firms of H. R. Mann and Company as an office boy and policy clerk. After business hours, he marketed fire insurance. By nineteen, he had bought out his employers and organized his own successful agency. During his early twenties he broadened out into other business activities. At twenty-three he was called to preside over the Tooele Stake. And two years later, in October 1882, he filled the destiny seen by Bishop Woolley when he was set apart as a member of the Quorum of the Twelve.

While Rachel’s son became the most prominent of Jedediah’s children, there were actually ten others from six other plural wives
Jedediah and Heber Grant (Caroline Van Dyke, Susan Fairchild Noble, Rosetta Robinson, Sarah Ann Thurston, Louisa Marie Goulay, and Maryette Kesler). Two daughters died in their youth; the two other daughters, Rosette (Marshall) and Susan Vilate (Muir), settled on out-of-the-way Utah farms.

Jedediah’s seven sons pursued a variety of paths (illus. 1-2). After a long and successful mission to England, George was killed in a hunting accident a few months short of his thirtieth birthday. Lewis McKeachie, an adopted Scottish orphan, managed the Grant family lands in Davis County, Utah, where he also served as a justice of the peace, county selectman, city judge, and bishop. Jedediah Morgan Grant Jr. farmed for several decades in Rich County, Utah, and later pioneered in the Big Horn Basin of Wyoming, concluding his Church service as a patriarch.12

Joshua, Joseph Hyrum, and Brigham Frederick played a role in many of Heber’s businesses, but these brothers also made their own way. Joshua helped found Utah’s largest wagon and implement business, served on the Salt Lake Board of Education, and later managed the American Steel and Wire Company.

Illus. 1-2. Six of Jedediah Grant’s sons, 1877. Top row (left to right), Brigham F., Heber J., Joshua F. Bottom row (left to right), Jedediah M., Joseph H., George S.
Hyrum’s fine eye and gentle way with horses made him for a time the manager of the Grant Brothers’ Livery and Transfer Company. Later, while farming in Bountiful, he contracted jaundice. The disease wasted his body to about seventy pounds, and doctors, failing to detect a pulse, pronounced him dead. Yet a priesthood blessing promised him both life and the opportunity to serve as Davis Stake President. Hyrum realized both promises.\textsuperscript{13}

The life story of B. F. Grant reads like a romance novel. Abandoned by his mother as an infant and apprenticed to a stern and heavy-handed Cache County farmer at six, the boy fled to Montana as a stowaway in a freighter’s wagon at the age of twelve. The lad then traveled throughout the West as a miner, cowboy, and laborer. When B. F. arrived back in Salt Lake City at the age of about fifteen, Brigham Young extended a helping hand, giving him work and schooling. But it was not until B. F. was about forty—after bankruptcy and thoughts of suicide—that he returned to the faith of his father. B. F. concluded his career as a convincing preacher to wayward youth, as Salt Lake City’s chief of police, and later as general manager of the \textit{Deseret News}.

Elder Marriner W. Merrill of the Quorum of the Twelve had an explanation for B. F.’s return to Church activity. The night after his Cache County neighbors learned that the boy had run away, Elder Merrill had a dream about B. F. He saw him in all kinds of wicked company, but B. F. was always surrounded by a light. When Elder Merrill wondered about the meaning of the light, he was told: “It is the influence of the boy’s father who, having been faithful, is permitted to protect him from being contaminated with the sins of the world, so that he can return to the fold of Christ.”\textsuperscript{14}

Whatever the reason, it is remarkable that despite the disintegration of Jedediah’s family after his death, all his children except Joshua became active Church members.

Moreover the Grant second generation achieved a remarkable unity, particularly the sons. “We are all the very best of friends and have never had any family difficulties to speak of and we work with pleasure to aid each other in our business affairs,” Heber said of the Grant boys’ relationship thirty-five years after Jedediah’s demise. “There are none of us who have the same mothers so it is not to be supposed we would be as much alike in
dispositions as some brothers are and yet I think that we are
greater friends and more united than many brothers where there
was but one mother.”

Jedediah would have been pleased.

Heber’s Family—the Third Generation

“What, are you writing home again?” Brigham Young Jr. asked
Heber J. Grant. “I must say that I have never seen a man so badly
cracked on the home question as you are.” The two members of the
Quorum of the Twelve were traveling through Arizona Territory,
and the new Apostle had taken every opportunity to write to his
family. Elder Grant admitted feeling homesick. “This is my first
experience in being away from home and I am free to confess that
I . . . long for the time that I can embrace my darling wife and
mother and kiss three little girls.”

Despite many subsequent years of Church travel, Grant always
felt lonely when away from his family. His return home was usually a
joyous occasion. “What a jubilant time we had when he came home!”
a daughter remembered. “We would all gather around and listen to
his experiences. I can see him now walking around the house with a
child on each foot, or tossing the children up on his knee.”

Grant came to have a large family—three wives and twelve chil-
dren (illus. 1-3). The lovely and hard-working Lucy Stringham was
his first wife. Young Heber vowed to capture her before his twenty-first
birthday and succeeded with three weeks to spare. Seven years later
he also married Huldah Augusta Winters and Emily Wells (illus. 1-4).

The three Grant wives were remarkably similar. They were well
educated for the times. All had taught school. Augusta in fact con-
ducted classes ten years before her marriage and was reputed to be the
ablest and highest-salaried schoolmarm in the territory. Each
of the women bore a quiet but firm belief in her religion, and each
descended from pioneer families. Lucy’s father was a former coun-
selor in the Thirteenth Ward bishopric, the taciturn Bryant Stringham.
Augusta came from early settlers who farmed in Pleasant Grove,
Utah. The shy Emily was the daughter of Daniel Wells, Jedediah
Grant’s successor in the First Presidency.

These three women, their husband, and Rachel, who lived into
her eighty-eighth year, set the tone for the Grant household. Church
Illus. 1-3. Heber J. Grant’s ten daughters, ca. 1902. Back row (left to right): Anna (Midgley), Florence (Smith), Martha Deseret “Dessie” (Boyle), Edith (Young). Front row (left to right): Susan Rachel “Ray” (Taylor), Mary (Judd), Frances Marion (Bennett), Emily (Mansen), Grace (Evans), and Lucy “Lutie” (Cannon). Heber’s two sons died young.
activity was always stressed. As one daughter said of the family’s commitment to the Church: “In our home we seemed to observe an unwritten law that Church service came first and home duties second. We early became aware that the best way to show our love and appreciation for our parents was to do our best to help in Church organizations. There was no way we could make them happier than to be faithful in Church duties.”

The children were also introduced to cultural influences. Elder Grant for many years owned the controlling interest in the majestic Salt Lake Theatre, and the family attended its performances at least weekly. Following a play, the children were asked to discuss the production at the family dinner table, a practice that led one Grant child to “count the theater second only to [her] actual schooling in educational value.”

The printed word likewise had a high place among the Grants. Books filled Elder Grant’s homes. “It was as natural for us to read as to eat or sleep,” Augusta’s daughter Mary later wrote. Like the morality plays of the Salt Lake Theater, the Grant library taught “right and wrong.” Emphasis was upon Victorian didacticism rather than “great works.”

The dictum “spare the rod and spoil the child” never had much of a place in raising the Grant children, so Lucy recalls. Rachel had indulged young Heber, balancing light discipline with loving but demanding expectations. The formula was now tried upon another generation. “They will only be children once,” Elder Grant explained, “and I want them to get as much pleasure as they can out of life as they go along.”

The Panic of 1893 removed any possibility of spoiling the children. Wealthy before its onslaught, Elder Grant was left with crushing debts. Nickels now seemed worth dollars. Domestic help became an unaffordable luxury. The children, particularly Lucy’s older family, rose to the challenge. They helped with household chores and even with their father’s debts. “As soon as we were old enough,” one remembered, “we started to work in his office, and it was the greatest satisfaction of our young lives to feel that we were helping him by caring for ourselves and in that way sharing his heavy burden of debt.” The depression of the 1890s brought increased family purpose and solidarity.
The Grant home life had other challenges. Elder Grant admitted that even in the best of times plural marriage was difficult. And the 1880s and 1890s, with Congress and the federal courts attempting to stop the practice, were not the best of times. While the Grants succeeded in achieving genuine love within the system, it also placed great strain upon the family. At times there were weeks and even months when Elder Grant was separated from his loved ones.

The Grant family felt the tragedy of death. Both of the Church leader’s sons died in childhood. His beloved Lucy passed away at the age of thirty-four, leaving five children between the ages of four and fourteen (Anna, Edith, Florence, Lucy, and Rachel; Heber was deceased). Emily’s early death in 1908 occurred when her two youngest children were eight and eleven (Frances and Emily, the others were Grace and Martha Deseret; Daniel had passed away). Yet the family remained united, just as the second generation had. “Aunt” Augusta (her child was Mary) helped raised Lucy’s family, while Emily’s young children were brought up by older sisters.

The ten Grant daughters remembered a happy early life. There were family outings such as picnics and drives through the city, ward parties where their much-in-demand father danced only with his children, and fatherly letters that counseled but never carped.

Indeed, Elder Grant always seemed to say the right things at the right time. Once Augusta suggested that each of them point out the annoying habits of the other. Her husband agreed. She mentioned several of Heber’s idiosyncrasies and waited for his suggestions. There was “a slight twinkle in his eye,” she remembered, and then he replied, “You haven’t one.”

Such tact calms even the most troubled matrimonial waters.

The Fourth Generation—and Beyond

On November 20, 1978, 252 members of the Heber J. Grant family met in the Federal Heights Ward building in Salt Lake City. As part of the program, a pamphlet profiling the characteristics of the family was distributed. The pamphlet showed how this branch of the Jedediah Grant family had multiplied and prospered. The booklet recorded 454 descendants of Heber J. Grant (607 if spouses were counted). There had been 166 marriages, but only 13 divorces—less than one-fifth of the current United States national average. The
family mirrored the Church’s post–World War II migration trends. While 60 percent of the descendants continued to live in Utah, Grants now resided in twenty-one other states.

The Grants have continued to serve their church. Five of President Grant’s daughters were called either to an auxiliary general presidency or a general board: Lucy Cannon, YWMIA General President; Dessie Boyle, Primary presidency; and Rachel Taylor, Mary Judd, and Frances Bennett of the YWMIA, Relief Society, and Primary general boards. Two of the Grant daughters married men who became General Authorities: Rachel, wife of John H. Taylor of the First Council of Seventy, and Edith, wife of Clifford E. Young, an Assistant to the Twelve. Florence Smith, another child, served as matron of the Salt Lake Temple.

Later generations have also accepted calls at the general Church level. Florence Jacobsen followed her aunt as a president of the YWMIA. George I. Cannon, later President of the Salt Lake Temple and an Area Authority Seventy, and Lucy Taylor Anderson, later part of the Primary General Presidency, both worked as counselors in the YMMIA General Presidencies. At least eight other descendants have served on Church general boards, while another three have presided over missions.

The Grants’ service at the local level has been even more extensive. The family has served in callings ranging from YWMIA and YMMIA president, to elders quorum president, to bishop and stake president. As of 1980, President Grant’s descendants had filled 130 missions.

All this from a family whose beginnings in early Utah history had seemed tentative and troubled. Despite their trials and in some degree because of them, Jedediah, Heber, and the first Grant women had created a family in the image of their own hopes, personalities, and talents. Their concern for higher things—their church, family, and the ideals of education and service—engendered a similar concern in their descendants.

Notes

This article was originally published in Ensign 9 (July 1979): 46–52.

1. Wilford Woodruff, Journal, December 1, 1856, Church Archives, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Salt Lake City. For details on...

2. Thedy Grant Reeves, Reminiscence, as told to Joseph Hyrum Grant Jr., November 26, 1904, Lanthrop, Missouri, as quoted in Sessions, *Mormon Thunder*, 6.


5. Wilford Woodruff to Brigham Young, December 3, 1844, Brigham Young Collection, Church Archives.


7. Mary Grant Judd, “Rachel Ridgeway Ivins Grant,” *Relief Society Magazine* 30 (April 1943): 228–29. Both family and printed sources differ in the spelling of “Ridgeway”; I have used the form that appears on the earliest family records. See also Joseph Smith, *Young Woman’s Journal* 16, no. 12 (December 1905): 550.


12. For brief biographical sketches of the Grant family, see Sessions, *Mormon Thunder*, 293–97.


14. Heber J. Grant to Joseph Hyrum Grant Jr., December 3, 1917, copy, in author’s possession.

15. Heber J. Grant to Ann Smith, June 4, 1892, Grant Letterpress Copybook, 13:248, Heber J. Grant Papers, Church Archives. See also 114th Annual Conference of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1944), 7.

16. Heber J. Grant to Lucy Grant, February 26, 1883, Lucy Stringham Grant Papers, Church Archives.
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21. Heber J. Grant to Anna L. Ivins, January 1, 1895, Grant Letterpress Copybook, 18:464.
24. [Carol C. and Gordon A. Madsen], The Heber J. Grant Family: A Study (Salt Lake City: privately printed, 1978).