

# Young Heber J. Grant and His Call to the Apostleship



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Ronald W. Walker

A year following his call to become president of the Tooele Stake, the twenty-four year old Heber J. Grant stopped by the Salt Lake studio of Charles Savage, the pioneer photographer. The conversation took an unexpected turn. He told me, Elder Grant wrote in his journal, “to put it down that within one year I would be a member of the Twelve Apostles.”<sup>1</sup>

One year and a few days later, young Heber received his call. The assignment led the new apostle’s two closest friends, Anthony W. Ivins and Richard W. Young, to write letters of encouragement. Their correspondence reveals that Savage’s prediction was by no means unique. “I have long felt that your destiny was sure,” Ivins wrote from his mission in Mexico, “but hardly looked to see you go into the Quorum so soon. The sooner in, however, the sooner you become accustomed to the harness and to the life of usefulness which is before you.”<sup>2</sup> Likewise Young’s letter, parts of which appear below, suggests that only the timing of Grant’s apostolic call surprised his friends; in addition it etches a revealing character portrait of the future LDS president.

Despite his youth Heber J. Grant had already displayed his talents in a remarkable fashion. At the age of fifteen, he had been employed as a policy clerk by the insurance firm of H. R. Mann & Co. 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. And at twenty-three he was called to preside over the Tooele Stake.

But now this already successful and confident man was forced to take personal stock. Whatever his friends’ vaunted opinions, he understood his own weaknesses and strengths. Would his talents be equal to the task at hand? Could his towering business ambitions be properly channeled? In what ways did his new assignment cause him to reflect upon his Mormonism? The young apostle sought to answer these questions as he replied to his friends’ letters.

Elder Grant’s star eclipsed those of Young and Ivins, but each later achieved prominence. Young was a grandson of Brigham and a graduate of both West Point and the Columbia Law School. Later he would distinguish himself in the American occupation of the Philippine Islands and by his

civic and Church service in his native Salt Lake City. Ivins, in turn, was Grant's cousin and proved to be his closest confidant. In 1907 Ivins himself was selected to be an apostle. Fourteen years later, Heber Grant—now as the Mormon Church president—chose Ivins to sit beside him in the First Presidency.

1. Excerpts of the Letter of Heber J. Grant to Anthony W. Ivins, SLC, 22 October 1882.<sup>3</sup>

Well Tony, your predictions, made last March, as we were going to Saint George, that I would be one of the Apostles, has been fulfilled. You know the true sentiments of my heart on this subject, (as well as many others) and that they were not in accord with your prediction, not that I feel to shrink from any duty, but because I did not, nor do I now, feel that my knowledge, ability, or testimony are of such a character as to entitle me to the position of an Apostle, The Lord knows what is for the best and I have always trusted in Him for aid and assistance in the past and shall continue to do so in the future, As advised in my last letter, on the 16th George Teasdale and myself were ordained as Apostles, the 1st Presidency and Twelve officiating, Bros Rich, Carrington and Thatcher were absent, Prest Taylor was mouth in Bro Teasdale's ordination, Prest Cannon in mine, I shall return to Salt Lake in the morning, When I expect to get a copy of the revelation calling Bro Teasdale & myself as Apostles.<sup>4</sup> Bro. S.B. Young as Prest of Seventies, etc, also a copy of my ordination, and I will forward these documents with this letter.

I don't know how things will shape with me in the future from a financial standpoint. You will notice that Prest Cannon warned me particularly about setting my mind on the things of this world. While I have devoted most all of my time to acquiring this world's goods in the past, I can truthfully say that never in my life have I seen the time that I was not willing to change my plan of action at the word of command from God's servants, I did not do so much good in Tooele as I might, had I not been engaged in business,<sup>5</sup> I know this and several times expressed my willingness to drop my business if thought best by the authorities. While I have worked hard for *Cash*, you know as do all of my friends that have a full knowledge of the inmost sentiments of my heart, that *Cash* has not been my God and that my heart never been set on it only to do good with what might come into my profession, I most earnestly desire that I may always feel this way. Bro. Erastus Snow comes the nearest to my idea of what an Apostle should be of any member of the Twelve, When I recall his life and labors and stop to think how little time and attention he has for his family or his financial interests, and how much time he has for the people and their interests, and how freely, and without a word of complaint, he neglected his own comfort & worldly welfare for the benefit of others, I am fully convinced that should I follow his noble example, and I shall try to do so, that my financial interests are comparatively speaking at an end. My heart is full of thankfulness to my Heavenly Father for his goodness and mercy to me, I have not language to express the feelings of gratitude in my heart, but I have made up my mind that from this time forth, my life shall be devoted to the work of God upon the Earth, If He gives me time to do my duties in his Kingdom and also make money, all right, if not all right. I feel in my heart to

say “Father thy will not mine be done.” Dear Cousin, I feel with God’s aid & the faith and prayers of my friends, especially those that know me as you do, that I shall be able to accomplishing some good, without this assistance I shall fail in my calling as an Apostle. I can hardly realize that I am an Apostle, Suppose the fact will become more real as I get down to work. I will now stop talking of myself. . . .

2. Letter of Richard W. Young to Heber J. Grant, 7 November 1882, written from Fort Columbus on Governors Island, New York.<sup>6</sup>

My Dear Heber:

I will pardon you for thinking my long silence strange:—my only excuse to offer is that I have been moving and endeavoring to get settled since receiving your brief note and the news of your appointment—So you are one of the Twelve—Well, it is sooner than I looked for it, but certainly not sooner than meets with my approval, It has long been my impression that all that stood between you and that excellent body was time and some more experience

You have every reason to be ~~thankful~~ congratulated upon your success, so much the more from the fact that it is merited—As a young man, the youngest of the Quorum and as a man without a very extensive experience in matters of preaching, I can imagine that you feel impressed with your unworthiness for the position, but let me give it you as my frank opinion that the selection was one of the very best that could be made, I have no desire to flatter you, but simply to assist you in feeling more confidence in your newly acquired dignity,—when I say that I regard your judgment as about the finest of any of my acquaintances, and I consider your talent in general business, and your quickness to see a point and to unravel one up to the like qualities of any one, Your conversation to me has always been as free from vapor and as full of common sense, boiled down, as I have always been told your father’s was,

I consider that your generosity, moral worth and fidelity are all that could be asked—Now take a summing up of these qualities and manufacture a young man of 26 and my estimation, not as your friend, but as a disinterested party, you will have the best candidate for a vacancy in the Twelve to be found in the Church—And such I am certain is the opinion of everyone, I have not had an opportunity of conversing with many of our people but those I have seen—John Henry (Smith), Wm Groesbeck, Orson Arnold & Jimmy Clinton, While questioning the superiority of Bro Teasdale’s worth do not hesitate in approving your selection, I was told by Bro John Henry that the selections were given in so many words by revelation. Heber, you are truly a blessed man, If I am not wrong but few of the appointments in late years have been by direct revelation,

Fancy it—our belief that God, the Good, the Almighty ruler of the Universe, He at whose pleasure the worlds move & the stars give light—He whom so many generations have sought—our belief is that He is the fountain of our Church—this is as firmly my belief as it is my belief that He rules,—and He has been so far pleased with integrity and worth as to name you personally as one of His representatives on Earth,

I scarcely know how and what to write—there is not language which will do adequate justice to such an occasion, I can only say, my friend, that if joy

is not yours, that if resolve to sacrifice all to the Gospel is not yours, it is because you fail in your conception of the infinitely priceless nature of your selection,

My wish is that you may devote yourself to study, for no adornment of the mind is unnecessary to this work—that you may be blessed with the fullness of testimony of God and His Work, and that this may be the case and that you may be deeply impressed with the nature of your calling and become eminently useful therein is my earnest prayer.

....

Nervie (R.W.'s wife) wishes to congratulate you and we both desire remembrances to your wife and to your mother Do. to Ray & Lucy<sup>7</sup> remember their so called Uncle Richard—Write soon for I shall look for you to.

Your friend with more good luck to you.—R.W.—  
(Richard W. Young.)

3. Excerpt of Heber J. Grant's reply to Richard W. Young, SLC, 16 November 1882.<sup>8</sup>

With reference to my new calling and my abilities to magnify the same, I must say that I consider my position much in advance of my knowledge—I regret very much that I have not a better knowledge of grammar, as I murder the “Queens English” most fearfully—my orthography is perfectly *Emenseto* say the least—I have not a good memory, or if I have it has been so badly neglected that I have not found ~~it~~ out that it is good, My information on subjects relating to the advancement of a community amts to nothing, I know little or nothing of History—and were it not that I have from 15 to 25 yrs. in which to study to overtake such men as Lyman, Jos. F. Smith and others, and knowing that I have the right to call upon our Heavenly Father for assistance I assure you that I should almost like backing out—A knowledge, of grammar and orthography is necessary for a public speaker and one that has more or less writing to do,—I naturally dislike both of these studies and have not much faith in becoming proficient in either.—Your inventory of my abilities is “way up.” I should like to have you get someone to accept of your ideas but think it would be a difficult task, I may have a little common sense—In fact I know that I have, I also know that my first ideas, impressions, or quickness to see a point which ever you see fit to call it, is not bad, but this really amts to but very little you are looking for a substantial leading man. Reasoning powers and depth of thought are the qualities that count—There is one thing that sustains me, however, & that is the fact that all powers, of mind or body, come from God and that He is perfectly able & willing to qualify me for His work provided I am faithful in doing my part—This I hope to be able to do faithfully—I am also pleased to know that I shall have the faith & confidence of the people—This is a great thing as I know from personal experience while laboring in Tooele County—The folks join in regards & best wishes for your continued health & prosperity also that of your wife—Time will not permit my writing more—Again thanking you for your good wishes I remain

Your Friend & Bro  
H.J. Grant

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1. *Journal of Heber J. Grant*, 7 October 1881, Library-Archives of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Salt Lake City, Utah.

2. Anthony W. Ivins to Heber J. Grant, 6 November 1882, in *Heber J. Grant Journal*, 25 November 1882.

3. Heber J. Grant letterpress copybook, 5:7–10, Church Archives.

4. For a copy of the revelation calling Elders Grant and Teasdale to the Twelve, see James R. Clark, ed., *Messages of the First Presidency of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints*, 6 vols. (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1965), 2:348–49.

5. After his call to the Tooele Stake Presidency, Elder Grant had moved his family to the western Utah village but had continued to conduct his Salt Lake business affairs. The result was that he spent as much time in Salt Lake as in Tooele, and local Church affairs sometimes suffered.

6. Copies in *Heber J. Grant Journal*, 17 November 1882, Church Archives. The explanations in parentheses and the end punctuation are apparently Grant's. The roughly educated churchman never seemed to master the use of the period.

7. "Ray" or Rachel and Lucy were the two eldest children of Heber and Lucy Stringham Grant.

8. Grant letterpress copybook, 5:62–63.