

they may be in the minority their influence in the politics of the Jewish state far outweighs their numbers.

Despite my questions on these and other points, I see this book as an important achievement. Dr. Ludlow is especially to be commended for his introduction to the poetic imagery and explanation of the lyrics of Isaiah. The English approximations are faithful and give much of the richness of Isaiah's colors. I look forward to more.

SESSIONS, GENE A. *Mormon Thunder: A Documentary History of Jedediah Morgan Grant*. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1982. 413 pp. \$16.95.

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As in the days of Noah, when holy writ confirms there were "giants on the earth," early Mormonism had its share of large and imposing figures. Jedediah Morgan Grant—most Saints affectionately called him "Jeddy"—was certainly one of these. As Salt Lake City's first mayor, counselor to President Brigham Young, and especially stump preacher extraordinaire, Jedediah Grant seemed larger than life. His fervid preaching won Mormonism a plentiful harvest of converts and created several long-standing, heroic missionary legends. Later, his strong words called to life the 1856–57 Mormon Reformation. Unhappily, this crusade to perfect the Saints led to his death. In the middle of the reform's excitement, weakened by overexertion, he succumbed to typhoid fever, compounded by pneumonia. To his friends, he became a gospel martyr who had sacrificed himself at the age of forty to a premature grave. Anti-Mormons pronounced a harsher verdict. To them, he was a religious fanatic, a Mormon Savonarola whose frenzy had finally consumed him.

It is not easy to find the reality about such a man, wrapped as he is with legend, tragedy, and the distorted images that his own fiery sermons create. Gene Sessions, a member of the Weber State College History Department, is the second biographer to attempt to find the truth behind the legend. Like Mary G. Judd's 1959 portrait, Session's view is sympathetic and heroic. But he has replaced the reverent hagiography of the former era with more careful analysis and greater detachment—and with periodic impish impiety. Jeddy was "no twentieth-century Mormon leader in his business suit," Sessions



writes in his preface, “expounding the ideals of passive Americanism, i.e., the good life filled with material comforts and middle-class elitism. I saw [in him] instead a pious yet rambunctiously radical preacher, flogging away at his people, demanding otherworldliness and constant sacrifice” (p. xi).

The dichotomy of past and present-day Mormonism is important to Sessions, who uses the distinction to explain Jeddy’s historical role. Jeddy personifies Mormonism’s lost adolescence—as representative of the early Saint as Andrew Jackson was of the new American. Clearly Sessions likes his analogy: Jedediah Grant, though rough-and-ready and given to robust oratory, was also sensible, generous, often tender, and better educated than his detractors conceded. Moreover, according to Sessions, Jeddy was supremely dedicated to nineteenth-century Mormonism’s twin ideals of personal piety and social improvement.

Professor Sessions pursues his task unconventionally. Reminiscent of pre-Strachean biography which substituted quotation for narration, he has chosen to write a “documentary history” (p. xii). The result is the inclusion of long excerpts from Jeddy’s letters and sermons, correspondence from others, and miscellaneous tableaux—some of limited biographical value—all tied together by narrative prose and analysis. The appendices, which comprise over a fourth of the book’s four hundred pages, offer a chronology of Grant’s life, sketches of the *dramatis personae*, and the full text of Jeddy’s celebrated (and partially ghost-written) letters to the *New York Herald* during the Judge Brocchus dispute.

Basic questions might be asked about the book’s documentary approach. At times, important biographical information is “hidden” within the quoted material, awaiting emphasis and explication. Also, there are nagging questions about Grant’s sermons. Were they substantially revised by contemporary editors? Has Sessions’s condensing (without the normal use of ellipses) preserved the preacher’s original style? And there are problems with biographical balance. By chaining his narrative to quotations, Sessions fails to give a balanced view of Jeddy. For instance, Jeddy’s important barnstorming through central New Jersey, his financial and professional activities, and his Nauvoo Legion and mayorial duties receive only passing treatment, although secondary information exists to describe these facets of his career.

Nevertheless, for those with the interest to read the large and often undigested blocks of quoted material, the results can be instructive and even fun. Grant’s Jonathan Edwards-like preachments of moral regeneration or blood atonement are balanced by his more prosaic, over-the-collar remarks. Together they convey the spirit of



early Utah society. “Now when you come to Zion,” he advised the Saints, “you will find men standing upon their feet; but go into the world, and there, if a man wants to show himself to be a smart man, he must mount a cabbage leaf, hiccup, and hump up to spit over his shirt collar.” Grant’s mayorial papers can be equally colorful. “May all the sluggards and the drones who will not . . . [keep the city in good order],” he once wrote his constituency with mock solemnity, “be bit by bed-bugs, and tormented by the nightmare, and have their bodies clogged with a conscience clear as mud.” Might all state papers be so pungent!

Like Jedediah Grant, Sessions knows how to turn a phrase, a skill that often lightens his heavy use of documents. Unfortunately, Sessions shares with Jeddy a bent for dramatic images and adjectives. This, when coupled with the narrative’s continual sense of anticipation and portent, becomes emotionally exhaustive. Likewise, they have a tendency to trade careful judgments for verve and color. For example, recent scholarship fails to collaborate Sessions’s belief that Joseph Smith’s Kirtland dealings were “naive financial machinations” (p. 15). The phrase “the rambunctious and expanding dictatorship of Brigham Young” requires explanation or at least qualification. Similarly, Paul H. Peterson’s recent well-documented dissertation suggests the Mormon Reformation had a deliberate quality that escapes Sessions’s analysis. Other examples could be cited.

But perhaps Sessions is right to concentrate on Jeddy’s character and “speechifying,” for within these categories lies the crux of Grant’s enigma. His good will, high spirits, intelligence, and open-handed charity earned him his community’s general esteem, while those who knew him casually or only through his speeches tended to perceive Jedediah Grant as an intense and brittle fanatic. We are therefore indebted to Professor Sessions for sorting through these images and creating a sympathetic and mostly accurate portrait. No doubt the “true-believing” Jeddy was a complex man, at times harsh and aggressive in language but generally humane and kind in behavior.

Our perceiving these qualities as polar can largely be explained by our looking at Jeddy from the perspective of our times, of our own preaching conventions. He is better understood against the backdrop of the robust conventions of his own time. It was a frank and sometimes unrefined era yet to reap the benefits of Victorianism’s softening touch. The pulpit was then seen as a major tool of social uplift; sermons, filled with strong and expressive language, sought to “improve” congregations as well as to evangelize them. While true of British and American culture as a whole, these trends were particularly common

in frontier Utah, with its young, enthusiastic, and social-improving religion. Jeddy, of course, embodied this preaching milieu, but no more so than many Mormons, including his ecclesiastical superiors, Brigham Young and Heber C. Kimball. Indeed, Jedediah Grant was probably no more “representative” of his broader culture than they.

Sessions doubts that the mountain preacher could have prospered in our more sophisticated era. “The early grave that swallowed Brother Jedediah was consequently a compassionate haven for such a boisterous amplification of what Mormonism really was, and would never be again” (p. 72). There is, of course, no way of knowing. But Heber C. Kimball, a man like Jeddy in so many ways, did make the transition. Jeddy’s own son, Heber J. Grant, made the transition. My hunch is, given the chance, Jedediah Grant would have too.