

JOSEPH SMITH'S "WHITE HORSE" PROPHECY

by Sandra Tanner

Since United States Senator Orrin Hatch, a faithful Mormon, announced his candidacy in 1999 for the office of President of the United States, there has been growing interest in how he views the U.S. Constitution and one of Joseph Smith's little known prophecies. In the *Salt Lake Tribune*, November 11, 1999, there was an article titled, "Did Hatch Allude To LDS Prophecy?" The article stated:

Sen. Orrin Hatch has denied his Republican presidential campaign is motivated by a longing to fulfill an obscure Mormon myth. But during an interview with a Mormon Church-owned radio station this week he borrowed the exact phrasing of the apocalyptic belief.

According to the so-called "White Horse Prophecy," the U.S. Constitution will be hanging by a thread and a church elder from Zion will ride in on a metaphorical white horse and save it.

Utah's senior senator . . . complained that Democrats' political correctness will be the ruin of the country.

"They tolerate everything that's bad, and they're intolerant of everything that's good. Religious freedom is going to go down the drain, too," Hatch said. "I've never seen it worse than this, where the Constitution literally is hanging by a thread."

. . . Wright [the radio interviewer], also a Mormon said Hatch clearly was "talking to his folks" in the church audience and his use of the phrase was the buzz of the station afterward.

"It just caught me by surprise. It was worded carefully," Wright said Wednesday. "I'm not sure he saw himself as the one who would fulfill the prophecy, but I thought it walked a fine line. It's such a well-recognized phrase."

. . .

In July, Hatch called The Tribune to deny talk among GOP political insiders that he may have felt divinely inspired to seek the presidency. (*Salt Lake Tribune*, Nov. 11, 1999, pp. C1 & C4,)

This popular prophecy of Smith's is explained in the *Encyclopedia of Mormonism*:

LDS attachment to the Constitution has been further encouraged by an important oral tradition deriving from a statement attributed to **Joseph Smith**, according to which the **Constitution would "hang by a thread"** and be rescued, if at all, only with the help of the Saints. Church President John Taylor seemed to go further when he prophesied, "When the people shall have torn to shreds the Constitution of the United States the Elders of Israel will be found holding it up to the nations of the earth and proclaiming liberty and equal rights to all men" (JD 21:8). To defend the principles of the Constitution under circumstances where the "iniquity," or moral decay, of the people has torn it to shreds might well require wisdom at least equal to that of the men raised up to found it. In particular, it would require great insight into the relationship between freedom and virtue in a political embodiment of moral agency. (*Encyclopedia of Mormonism*, vol. 1, 1992)

Due to Senator Hatch's statements a number of people have contacted us for background information on Joseph Smith's prophecy.

Interest in this prophecy has surfaced once again as it seems to have been a part of the motivation behind "Deep Throat" of Watergate fame. On June 2, 2005 the *Salt Lake Tribune* reported that W. Mark Felt, Associate Deputy Director of the FBI during the 1970's, admitted to being the informant:

In October 1956, W. Mark Felt, now confirmed as *The Washington Post's* source "Deep Throat," rolled into Salt Lake City to take charge of the FBI office.

Felt, who in the early 1970s helped guide reporters Bob Woodward and Carl Bernstein's investigation of President Nixon and the Watergate scandal, spent 15 months in the Beehive State supervising some 40 agents who worked throughout Utah and Nevada. . . .

Salt Lake City was just one of many assignments the agent — who joined the FBI on Jan. 26, 1942 — would accept as he ascended the ranks of the bureau. . . .

Felt's admission to being Deep Throat came as no surprise to Salt Lake attorney Pat Shea.

Shea, a former U.S. Senate staffer, recalled Felt's desire to get to the bottom of things during a congressional investigation of the U.S. intelligence community, including assassination plots against foreign leaders.

After an interview session with witnesses, Felt would suggest to investigators, "This is something you might want to ask when you guys go back in there," recounts Shea, assistant staff director for the Senate Intelligence Committee in 1975-76.

The information was usually excellent, leading investigators into areas of inquiry that might otherwise have been overlooked.

Shea, a longtime Democratic Party activist and Bureau of Land Management director during the Clinton administration, believes Felt was motivated by anger over not being named FBI director and by long-standing animosity between the FBI and CIA.

"But," added Shea, "he also was a kid from Idaho." Felt retained a lot of small-town idealism from the culture in which he had been raised, including the LDS notion that in the latter days the U.S. Constitution would be hanging by a thread.

"Mark Felt saw himself as that thread sometimes," says Shea.

Felt, now 91, is a 1931 graduate of Twin Falls High School and 1935 graduate of the University of Idaho. ('Deep Throat' Lived in SLC, Supervising 40 FBI Agents, by Lisa Rosetta, *Salt Lake Tribune*, June 2, 2005)

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statement attributed to Joseph Smith, according to which the Constitution would “hang by a thread” and be rescued, if at all, only with the help of the Saints. Church President John Taylor seemed to go further when he prophesied, “When the people shall have torn to shreds the Constitution of the United States the Elders of Israel will be found holding it up to the nations of the earth and proclaiming liberty and equal rights to all men” (JD 21:8). To defend the principles of the Constitution under circumstances where the “iniquity,” or moral decay, of the people has torn it to shreds might well require wisdom at least equal to that of the men raised up to found it. In particular, it would require great insight into the relationship between freedom and virtue in a political embodiment of moral agency.” (*Encyclopedia of Mormonism*, vol. 1, 1992)

In 2008 Dana Milbank reported on Mormon Talk Show host Glenn Beck’s reference to the prophecy:

In one of his first appearances on Fox News, Glenn Beck sent a coded message to the nation’s six million Mormons — or at least those Mormons who believe in what the Latter-day Saints call “the White Horse Prophecy.”

“We are at the place where the Constitution hangs in the balance,” Beck told Bill O’Reilly on November 14, 2008, just after President Obama’s election. “I feel the Constitution is hanging in the balance right now, hanging by a thread unless the good Americans wake up.” (http://www.huffingtonpost.com/dana-milbank/post_996_b_749750.html)

Bill McKeever, of Mormonism Research Ministry, made the following observations about the prophecy:

[In 2006] Susan Easton Black, a BYU professor of church history and doctrine, reportedly said that “*the prophecy as a whole is false*” (“White Horse in the White House,” www.opinionjournal.com, November 3, 2006). Black’s blanket denial seems incredibly inconsistent in light of the above statements. If LDS leaders felt the prophecy “as a whole” is false, why refer to any of it?

Conservative talk-show host Glenn Beck also referred to the “*hang by a thread*” portion of the White Horse Prophecy when interviewed by Fox host Bill O’Reilly.

On January 6, 2010 the LDS Church issued the following statement on its Newsroom blogsite: “The so-called ‘White Horse Prophecy’ is based on accounts that have not been substantiated by historical research and is not embraced as Church doctrine.” The claim that it is not “embraced as Church doctrine” does not explain why so many LDS leaders have referred to it. Would these leaders even bother to speak of the prophecy if they really didn’t believe at least portions were true? Words like “doctrine” and “official” have little meaning given the fact that many aspects of Mormonism are believed to be true by members even though a particular teaching may never be described as “binding” or “official.”

Modern Mormons tend to ignore the more bizarre, apocalyptic language of the White Horse prophecy. The context of the “*hang by a thread*” phrase has been jettisoned, but the phrase itself has not. How each Mormon politician views his or herself as the fulfillment of this prediction must be judged on a case-to-case basis; however, there can be do

denying that to many, Smith’s prediction is taken very seriously and is very much a part of the Mormon political landscape. (<http://mrm.org/white-horse-prophecy>)

Most Mormons are unaware of their past leaders statements about the prophecy, but the concept that the constitution will one day “hang by a thread” and be saved by a Mormon elder seems to be well ingrained in their thinking.

ORIGIN OF PROPHECY

Some LDS people have questioned the reliability of the accounts of Joseph Smith’s prophecy concerning the constitution because it was denounced by LDS Apostle Bruce McConkie and President Joseph F. Smith. However, recent findings have established that Smith did give such a message.

Writing in 1979, LDS Apostle Bruce R. McConkie dismissed the prophesy as a forgery:

From time to time, accounts of various supposed visions, revelations, and prophecies are spread forth by and among the Latter-day Saints, who should know better than to believe or spread such false information. One of these **false and deceptive documents** that has cropped up again and again for over a century is the so-called **White Horse Prophecy**. This supposed prophecy purports to be a long and detailed account by the **Prophet Joseph Smith** concerning the wars, turmoils, and difficulties which should exist in the last days.

It is a sad commentary on the spiritual insight of professing saints that they will generate intense interest in these supposed prophetic utterances and yet know little of and pay less attention to the volumes of true and sound prophetic writings which delineate authoritatively the course of latter-day world events. It is known by all informed gospel students that whenever revealed truth, new or old, is to be sent forth for the enlightenment of the saints and of the world, it will be announced officially and publicly by the First Presidency.

Speaking, first of the **White Horse Prophecy** specifically, and then of all such false revelations in general, **President Joseph F. Smith** said: ‘The **ridiculous story** about the ‘red horse,’ and ‘the black horse,’ and ‘the white horse,’ and a lot of trash that has been circulated about, and printed, and **sent around as a great revelation given by the Prophet Joseph Smith, is a matter that was gotten up, I understand, some ten years after the death of the Prophet Joseph Smith**, by two of our brethren, who put together some broken sentences from the Prophet that they may have heard him utter from time to time, and formulated this so-called revelation out of it, and it was never spoken by the Prophet in the manner in which they have put it forth. It is simply false; that is all there is to it.

Now, these stories of revelations that are being circulated around are of no consequence, except for **rumor** and silly talk by persons that have no authority. The fact of the matter is simply here and this. No man can enter into God’s rest unless he will absorb the truth insofar that all error, all falsehood, all misunderstanding and misstatements, he will be able to sift thoroughly and dissolve, and know that it is error and not truth. When you know God’s truth, when you enter into God’s rest, you will not be hunting after revelations from Tom,

Dick, and Harry all over the world. You will not be following the will of the wisps of the vagaries of men and their own ideas. When you know the truth, you will abide in the truth, and the truth will make you free, and it is only the truth that will free you from the errors of men, and from the **falsehood and misrepresentations** of the evil one, who lies in wait to deceive and to mislead the people of God from the paths of righteousness and truth. (Conference Report, Oct. 1918, p. 58.) (Bruce R. McConkie, *Mormon Doctrine*, p. 835)

However, an article in the *BYU Studies* indicates that Smith did give such a discourse and that it was copied down by a faithful Mormon:

Since, by 1840, there was not yet a procedure in the Church for systematically reporting all of Joseph Smith's speeches, many of his addresses were never recorded, and others were preserved only unofficially in the personal writings of lay members.³ In addition, the longhand reports recorded at the time were subject to inherent limitations because of the absence among Church members of sufficiently developed shorthand skills to permit verbatim reporting during Joseph Smith's lifetime. This accounts for the existence of some reports of Joseph Smith speeches that are not referred to in the Prophet's History. The Martha Jane Knowlton report of July 1840 is of this genre. . . .

The July 1840 context suggests that Joseph Smith's comments about the U.S. Constitution were given not long after his return from Washington, D.C., where his appeal for redress for the wrongs heaped upon his people in Missouri had fallen upon deaf ears. The address also gives significant insight into the marvelous anticipations and hopes the Prophet had for Nauvoo in its beginning phase. But, as one looks at the city from a later perspective, it is evident that the prophecies about Nauvoo, like Jackson County before it, were contingent upon human conditions and failings. . . . The discourse as reported by Martha Jane Knowlton is as follows:

"A few Item[s] from a discourse delivered by **Joseph Smith** July 19 - 1840. . . .

"We shall build the Zion of the Lord in peace untill the servants of that Lord shall begin to lay the foundation of a great and high watch Tower and then shall they begin to say within themselves, what need hath my Lord of this tower seeing this is a time of peace &c. Then the Enemy shall come as a thief in the night and scatter the servants abroad. When the seed of these 12 Olive trees are scattered abroad they will wake up the Nations of the whole Earth. Even this Nation will be on the very verge of crumbling to pieces and tumbling to the ground and **when the constitution is upon the brink of ruin this people will be the Staff up[on] which the Nation shall lean and they shall bear the constitution away from the very verge of destruction.**" (The Historians Corner, *BYU Studies*, vol. 19, no. 3, pp. 391-392)

Another reference to this prophecy is found in the book, *Words of Joseph Smith*:

The History of the Church account is an amalgamation of the reports in the Joseph Smith Diary and the Nauvoo Neighbor. The report by Levi Richards is here published for the first time. A reminiscent account of this discourse by James

Burgess contains the essential details found in the other three accounts published here, and adds that the "**Constitution and Government would hang by a brittle thread.**"

In the month of May 1843. Several miles east of Nauvoo. The Nauvoo Legion was on parade and review. At the close of which Joseph Smith made some remarks upon our condition as a people and upon our future prospects contrasting our present condition with our past trials and persecutions by the hands of our enemies. **Also upon the constitution and government of the United States stating that the time would come when the Constitution and Government would hang by a brittle thread and would be ready to fall into other hands but this people the Latter day Saints will step forth and save it.**

General Scott and part of his staff on the American Army was present on the occasion.

I James Burgess was present and testify to the above (James Burgess Notebook, Church Archives). (Ehat & Cook, *Words of Joseph Smith*, 6 May 1843 Note, p. 279)

In the book, *Discourses of Brigham Young*, an edited collection of President Young's sermons from the *Journal of Discourses*, we read:

How long will it be before the words of the **prophet Joseph will be fulfilled?** He said if the **Constitution of the United States were saved at all it must be done by this people.** It will not be many years before these words come to pass. 12:204.

When the Constitution of the United States hangs, as it were, upon a single thread, they will have to call for the "Mormon" Elders to save it from utter destruction; and they will step forth and do it. 2:182.

The present Constitution, with a few alterations of a trifling nature, is just as good as we want; and **if it is sustained on this land of Joseph, it will be done by us and our posterity.** 8:324.

I expect to see the day when the Elders of Israel will protect and sustain civil and religious liberty and every Constitutional right bequeathed to us by our fathers, and spread these rights abroad in connection with the Gospel for the salvation of all nations. I shall see this whether I live or die. 11:262.

Will the Constitution be destroyed? No; it will be held inviolate by this people; and, as Joseph Smith said, "The time will come when the destiny of the nation will hang upon a single thread. At this critical juncture, this people will step forth and save it from the threatened destruction." It will be so. 7:15. (*Discourses of Brigham Young*, pp. 360-361 and p. 469)

[Note: the references at the ends of the paragraphs are the volume and page number of the quote as it appeared in the *Journal of Discourses*.]

Joseph F. Smith, sixth president of the LDS Church, wrote in *Gospel Doctrine*, p. 403:

Now, these are the commandments of God, the principles contained in these commandments of the great Eternal are the principles that underly the Constitution of our country, and all just laws. **Joseph Smith, the prophet, was inspired to affirm**

and ratify this truth, and he further predicted that the time would come, when the Constitution of our country would hang as it were by a thread, and that the Latter-day Saints, above all other people in the world, would come to the rescue of that great and glorious palladium of our liberty. We cannot brook the thought of it being torn into shreds, or destroyed, or trampled under foot and ignored by men. We cannot tolerate the sentiment, at one time expressed, by a man high in authority in the nation. He said: “The constitution be damned; the popular sentiment of the people is the constitution!” That is the sentiment of anarchism, and has spread to a certain extent, and is spreading over “the land of liberty and the home of the brave.” We do not tolerate it. Latter-day Saints cannot tolerate such a spirit as this. It is anarchy. It means destruction. It is the spirit of mobocracy, and the Lord knows we have suffered enough from mobocracy, and we do not want any more of it. Our people from Mexico are suffering from the effects of that same spirit. We do not want any more of it, and we cannot afford to yield to that spirit or contribute to it in the least degree. We should stand with a front like flint against every spirit or species of contempt or disrespect for the constitution of our country and the constitutional laws of our land.—Oct. C. R., 1912, pp. 8-11.

In the book *Teachings of Ezra Taft Benson*, pp. 618-619, we read:

The Lord told the Prophet Joseph Smith there would be an attempt to overthrow the country by destroying the Constitution. **Joseph Smith predicted that the time would come when the Constitution would hang, as it were, by a thread,** and at that time “this people will step forth and save it from the threatened destruction” (*Journal of Discourses*, 7:15). It is my conviction that the elders of Israel, widely spread over the nation, will at that crucial time successfully rally the righteous of our country and provide the necessary balance of strength to save the institutions of constitutional government.

If the Gentiles on this land reject the word of God and conspire to overthrow liberty and the Constitution, their doom is fixed, and they “shall be cut off from among my people who are of the covenant” (1 Nephi 14:6; 3 Nephi 21:11, 14, 21; D&C 84:114-15, 117). (God, Family, Country, p. 345.)

As we spread abroad in this land, bearers of this priesthood, men and women with high ideals and standards, our influence will spread as we take positions of leadership in the community, in the state, in the nation, in the world. We will be able to sit in counsel with others and we will be able to influence others in paths of righteousness. **We will help to save this nation,** because this nation can only be preserved on the basis of righteous living. (“The Greatest Leadership,” BYU Student Leadership Conference, Sun Valley, Idaho, September 1959.)

LDS Apostle Orson F. Whitney, *Saturday Night Thoughts*, pp. 60-61, wrote:

Saviors of the Nation.—To escape the judgments hanging over the wicked, and find a place where they might worship God unmolested, the Latter-day Saints fled to the Rocky Mountains. Here, and here only, during the temporary isolation sought and found by them in the chambers of “the everlasting

hills,” could they hope to be let alone long enough to become strong enough to accomplish their greater destiny. For in that enforced exodus and the rounding of this mountain-girt empire there was more than the surface facts reveal. If tradition can be relied upon, **Joseph Smith prophesied that the Elders of Israel would save this Nation in the hour of its extremest peril.** At a time when anarchy would threaten the life of the Government, and **the Constitution be hanging as by a thread,** the maligned and misunderstood “Mormons”—always patriotic, and necessarily so from the very genius of their religion—would stand firm upon Freedom’s rocky ramparts, and as champions of law and order, liberty and justice, call to their aid in the same grand cause kindred [p.61] spirits from every part of the nation and from every corner of the world.

All this preparatory to a mighty movement that would sweep every form of evil from off the face of the land, and build the Zion of God upon the spot consecrated for its erection. **This traditional utterance of their martyred Seer is deeply imbedded in the heart and hope of the “Mormon” people.**

The following chronological selection of LDS quotes relating to this prophecy demonstrate its importance in the LDS mind.

1854

Journal of Discourses, vol. 7, p. 15, Brigham Young, July 4, 1854:

Will the Constitution be destroyed? No: it will be held inviolate by this people; and, as **Joseph Smith said, “The time will come when the destiny of the nation will hang upon a single thread.** At that critical juncture, this people will step forth and save it from the threatened destruction.” It will be so.

1855

Journal of Discourses, vol. 2, p. 182, Brigham Young, February 18, 1855:

Brethren and sisters, our friends wish to know our feelings towards the Government. I answer, they are first-rate, and we will prove it too, as you will see if you only live long enough, for that we shall live to prove it is certain; and **when the Constitution of the United States hangs, as it were, upon a single thread, they will have to call for the “Mormon” Elders to save it from utter destruction;** and they will step forth and do it.

We love the Constitution of our country; it is all we could ask; though in some few instances there might be some amendments made which would better it.

1912

Joseph F. Smith, *Conference Report*, October 1912, p. 11:

Now, these are the commandments of God, the principles contained in these commandments of the great Eternal are the principles that underly the Constitution of our country and all just laws. **Joseph Smith, the prophet, was inspired to affirm and ratify this truth, and he further predicted that the time would come, when the Constitution of our country would**

hang as it were by a thread, and that the Latter-day Saints above all other people in the world would come to the rescue of that great and glorious palladium of our liberty.

1922

Charles W. Nibley, *Conference Report*, October 1922, p. 40:

My brethren and sisters, I hope that we will go home from this conference determined as a great body of people, to stand for law, order, righteousness, justice and peace on earth and good will among all men. I believe as the **Prophet Joseph** has written, that the day would come when there would be so much of disorder, of secret combinations taking the law into their own hands, tramping upon Constitutional rights and the liberties of the people, that the **Constitution would hang as by a thread**. Yes, but it will still hang, and there will be enough of good people, many who may not belong to our Church at all, people who have respect for law and for order, and for Constitutional rights, who will rally around with us and save the Constitution. I have never read that that thread would be cut. It will hang; the Constitution will abide and this civilization, that the Lord has caused to be built up, will stand fortified through the power of God, by putting from our hearts all that is evil, or that is wrong in the sight of God, by our living as we should live, acceptable to him.

1928

Melvin J. Ballard, *Conference Report*, October 1928, p. 108:

The Prophet Joseph told us that he saw the day when even the Constitution of the United States would be torn and hang as by a thread. But, thank the Lord, the thread did not break. He saw the day when this people would be a balance of power to come to its defense. The Book of Mormon prophecies concerning the future of America have been referred to in our hearing during this conference, wherein it is stated that this nation, though it becomes a mighty nation, still it can stand in security here only as it serves the God of this land. That conception was in the hearts of the men who founded America.

1933

Melvin J. Ballard, *Conference Report*, April 1933, p. 127:

I believe that it is the destiny of the Latter-day Saints to support the Constitution of the United States. The **Prophet Joseph Smith** is alleged to have said—and I believe he did say it—that the day would come when **the Constitution would hang as by a thread**. But he saw that the thread did not break, thank the Lord, and that the Latter-day Saints would become a balance of power, with others, to preserve that Constitution. If there is—and there is one part of the Constitution hanging as by a thread today—where do the Latter-day Saints belong? Their place is to rally to the support of that Constitution, and maintain it and defend it and support it by their lives and by their vote. Let us not disappoint God nor his prophet. Our place is fixed.

1942

Harold B. Lee, *Conference Report*, April 1942, p. 87:

But beyond all that, the Latter-day Saints have a responsibility, that may be better understood when we recall the **prophecy of Joseph Smith** who declared that “the time would come when (the destiny and) the **Constitution of these United States would hang as it were by a thread**, and that this people, the sons of Zion, would rise up and save it from threatened destruction.” (J. of D., Vol. 7:15)

I want to ask you to consider the meaning of that **prophecy**, in the light of the declaration of the prophets of the Book of Mormon times, who declared that this land was a choice land above all other lands, and would be free from bondage and from captivity, and from all other nations under heaven, if they will but serve the God of this land, even our Savior, Jesus Christ. (Ether 2:12)

1942

J. Reuben Clark, Jr., *Conference Report*, October 1942, p. 58:

You and I have heard all our lives that the time may come when the **Constitution may hang by a thread**. I do not know whether it is a thread, or a small rope by which it now hangs, but I do know that whether it shall live or die is now in the balance.

1946

Mark E. Petersen, *Conference Report*, April 1946, p. 171:

How long will it be before the words of the prophet Joseph will be fulfilled? He said if the **Constitution of the United States were saved at all it must be done by this people**. It will not be many years before these words come to pass. When the Constitution of the United States **hangs, as it were, upon a single thread**, they will have to call for the “Mormon Elders to save it from utter destruction; and they will step forth and do it. . . . if it is sustained on this land of Joseph, it will be done by us and our posterity. (*Ibid.*, pp. 360, 361)

1948

Ezra Taft Benson, *Conference Report*, April 1948, p. 85:

It is no wonder that the Prophet Joseph said—even though he knew he would suffer martyrdom in this land—“**The Constitution** of the United States is a glorious standard; it is founded in the wisdom of God. It is a heavenly banner.”

Yet, according to his contemporaries, he foresaw the time when the destiny of the nation would be in danger and **would hang as by a thread**. Thank God he did not see the thread break. He also indicated the important part that this people should yet play in standing for the principles embodied in these sacred documents—the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution.

1949

Clifford E. Young, *Conference Report*, April 1949, pp. 75-76:

I would like to add this in conclusion. It is said that President Brigham Young, many years ago, made this statement:

When the Constitution of the United States hangs, as it were, upon a single thread, they will have to call for Mormon elders to save it from utter destruction: and they will step forth and do it. (Brigham Young, *Journal of Discourses*, 18, 1855.)

This is recorded in the *Journal of Discourses* and I presume it is accurate, but however it may be, is it not a possibility, that this Church, in its great leadership and in the power that will come to it in advocating the things that are divine and are right and true as for example the great welfare program, is not possible that when we as a nation shall have exhausted our resources—and we can well do that if we do not turn about—when we have we have reached that point is it not possible that to us will those who are not of us look for guidance and we will be held up as a people who are pointing an economic way that will mean for the economic and spiritual salvation and blessing of our people.

1950

Joseph Fielding Smith, *Conference Report*, April 1950, p. 159:

I must not take more time but to add this: The statement has been made that the **Prophet said the time would come when this Constitution would hang as by a thread**, and this is true. There has been some confusion, however, as to just what he said following this. I think that Elder Orson Hyde has given us a correct interpretation wherein he says that the **Prophet said the Constitution would be in danger**. Said Orson Hyde:

I believe he said something like this — that the time would come when the Constitution and the country would be in danger of an overthrow; and said he: **“If the Constitution be saved at all, it will be by the Elders of this Church.”** I believe this is about the language, as nearly as I can recollect it. (*Journal of Discourses*, 6:152.)

Now I tell you it is time the people of the United States were waking up with the understanding that if they don't save the Constitution from the dangers that threaten it, **we will have a change of government**.

1952

Harold B. Lee, *Conference Report*, October 1952, p. 18:

It was **Joseph Smith** who has been quoted as having said that the time would come when the **Constitution would hang as by a thread** and at that time when it was thus in jeopardy, **the elders of this Church would step forth and save it from destruction**.

Why the elders of this Church? Would it be sacrilegious to paraphrase the words of the Apostle Peter, and say that the Constitution of the United States could be saved by the elders of this Church because this Church and this Church alone has the words of eternal life? We alone know by revelation as to how the Constitution came into being, and we, alone, know

by revelation the destiny of this nation. The preservation of “life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness” can be guaranteed upon no other basis than upon a sincere faith and testimony of the divinity of these teachings.

1956

Joseph Fielding Smith Jr., *Doctrines of Salvation*, vol. 3, p. 326:

CONSTITUTION TO HANG BY A THREAD. The statement has been made that the Prophet said the time would come when this **Constitution would hang as by a thread**, and this is true. There has been some confusion, however, as to just what he said following this. I think that Elder Orson Hyde has given us a correct interpretation wherein he says that the Prophet said the Constitution would be in danger.

Said Orson Hyde: “I believe he said something like this—that the time would come when the Constitution and the country would be in danger of an overthrow; and said he: **‘If the Constitution be saved at all, it will be by the elders of this Church.’** I believe this is about the language, as nearly as I can recollect it.”

1961

Ezra Taft Benson, *Conference Report*, October 1961, p. 70:

Eleventh: In connection with attack on the United States, the Lord told the Prophet Joseph Smith there would be an attempt to overthrow the country by destroying the Constitution. Joseph Smith predicted that the time would come when the Constitution would hang, as it were, by a thread, and at that time “this people will step forth and save it from the threatened destruction.” (*Journal History*, Brigham Young's Speech, July 4, 1854.)

It is my conviction that the elders of Israel, widely spread over the nation will at that crucial time successfully rally the righteous of our country and provide the necessary balance of strength to save the institutions of constitutional government.

1961

Senator Wallace F. Bennett, *BYU Speeches*, February 15, 1961, p. 13:

We have much in our national system that militates against the rise of a dictator. The Bill of Rights with its philosophy of individual rights against oppression is still a curb on a power-hungry President. But if I were to guess as to how the **Constitution may “hang by a thread”** it would be because of the immense powers given to the President and his opportunity for their abuse.

Let us delve once again into the great principles of the Constitution and resolve that we will do all in our power to preserve these principles for our posterity. This is our duty as citizens of the United States, and pre-eminently our duty as Latter-day Saints, because without the Constitution this glorious restoration would not have taken place in this land and might not have taken place at this point in history.

1963

Ezra Taft Benson, *Conference Report*, April 1963, p. 113:

The Prophet Joseph Smith said the time would come when the Constitution would hang as it were by a thread. Modern-day prophets for the last thirty years have been warning us that we have been rapidly moving in that direction. Fortunately, the **Prophet Joseph Smith saw the part the elders of Israel would play in this crisis.** Will there be some of us who won't care about saving the Constitution, others who will be blinded by the craftiness of men, and some who will knowingly be working to destroy it? He that has ears to hear and eyes to see can discern by the Spirit and through the words of God's mouthpiece that our liberties are being taken.

1963

Judge Joseph E. Nelson, *BYU Speeches*, April 24, 1963, p. 3:

Our government is an organization which was to, and since has, enacted, judged and enforced law through and by legislative, judicial and executive departments. It is incumbent on the American people to steadfastly maintain the historic balance of power by the three branches of government if our political system is to be preserved. **If this is not done then the thread by which it has been predicted the Constitution will hang will be clipped and our form of government will disappear.** We, the American people, must not become so internationally minded as to sell our birthright for a spurious promise of world peace. The most nationally-minded people are our enemies. We must remain faithful to our pledge, regardless of charges of chauvinism, to preserve America "with our lives, our fortunes and our sacred honor."

1964

Dr. Ernest L. Wilkinson, *BYU Speeches*, February 18, 1964, p. 9:

I am concerned that in our worship of materialism in our country we now have an indebtedness of over \$5,000 for every man, woman, and child in this country. (This

includes obligations for goods already delivered and services already rendered to the government, although payable in the future.) I am concerned that we have in effect abandoned the Monroe Doctrine as our safeguard for ultimate protection of this hemisphere, and that as a result we are threatened with Communism not only in Cuba but in South America and now in Africa as well. **If the Constitution is to hang by a thread in this country, I want to be one to help to preserve it.**

1966

Dr. Ernest L. Wilkinson, *BYU Speeches*, April 21, 1966, p. 7:

In my commencement address I gave the language and sources of the **prophetic utterance made by the Prophet Joseph that the Constitution of the United States would hang by a single thread, but be saved by the elders of Israel.** I hope you will read those sources so you will be well-informed as to this prophecy and be prepared to do your part in its fulfillment.

Dr. Ernest L. Wilkinson, *BYU Speeches*, April 21, 1966, p. 9:

Now what has happened in our country during the time we have been plunging toward socialism? **Are we actually at that point where the Constitution may be hanging by a single thread and we need to step in to save it?**

[Quotes are taken from the CD-ROM *LDS Collectors Library*, 1997.]



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