

THE WHITE HORSE PROPHECY

by George Cobabe

In the mid 1850s, two men brought forth a prophecy they claimed Joseph Smith had spoken in 1843. In the intervening years this has become known as the White Horse Prophecy and has become encircled about by myth and stories and all sorts of comments and opinions. It has been declared untrue by some, and has allegedly been quoted by leaders of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. There are also many views as to what the “prophecy” contains and what it means.

This paper examines the claims, the text, and the source of many of the attributes associated with the White Horse Prophecy.

UNDERSTANDING PROPHECY IN THE CHURCH

Before beginning, it is important to understand how prophecy is given, accepted, and made part of the canon of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.

Standards for Acceptance of Prophecy

Although there are examples of foretelling the future through revelation, the primary purpose of prophecy is to make known divine truth by communication from heaven.¹ Revelation can come to any individual depending upon each individual’s need and faithfulness. Joseph Smith taught that, “No man can receive the Holy Ghost without receiving revelations. The Holy Ghost is a revelator.”² Every man or woman is entitled to receive the testimony of the truth and the mission of the Savior by revelation through the Holy Ghost.

It is important, however, to recognize that the Church of Jesus Christ is a church of order and not of confusion. Therefore, where the Church as a whole is concerned, revelation comes only through established channels, and is accepted

only through established procedures. These procedures are fixed and have been established through scripture and revelation.

The President of the Church is the only channel by which authoritative revelation may be received for the Church as a whole. This principle is clearly taught in the Doctrine and Covenants:

2 For behold, verily, verily, I say unto you, that ye have received a commandment for a law unto my church, through him whom I have appointed unto you to receive commandments and revelations from my hand.

3 And this ye shall know assuredly—that there is none other appointed unto you to receive commandments and revelations until he be taken, if he abide in me.

4 But verily, verily, I say unto you, that none else shall be appointed unto this gift except it be through him; for if it be taken from him he shall not have power except to appoint another in his stead.

5 And this shall be a law unto you, that ye receive not the teachings of any that shall come before you as revelations or commandments;

6 And this I give unto you that you may not be deceived, that you may know they are not of me.³

Verses 3 and 5 are particularly important to identifying the channel by which revelation is received for the Church: “...ye receive not the teachings of any that shall come before you ...” and “...there is none other appointed...to receive...revelations...”

Once a prophecy is received through the proper channel, there is a procedure in place that must be followed in order for the revelation to be binding on the Church at large. First, it is required



that the First Presidency and the Quorum of the Twelve be in agreement that the revelation is true and should be the canon of the Church. Second, the revelation must be communicated to the membership of the Church and accepted by them. As is stated in the Doctrine & Covenants, "all things must be done in order, and by common consent in the church, by the prayer of faith."⁴

How is Prophecy Properly Interpreted?

There is another important principle that must be observed in connection with any revelation given to an individual or the President of the Church. It is best expressed as found in 2 Peter:

19 We have also a more sure word of prophecy; whereunto ye do well that ye take heed, as unto a light that shineth in a dark place, until the day dawn, and the day star arise in your hearts:

20 Knowing this first, that no prophecy of the scripture is of any private interpretation.

21 For the prophecy came not in old time by the will of man: but holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost.⁵

Stephen L. Richards stated that there "is official interpretation of the doctrines and standards of the Church, and this knowledge comes from the prophets, seers, and revelators."⁶ Nephi, a prophet of the Book of Mormon, spoke of this issue when he said that "the words of Isaiah are not plain unto you, nevertheless they are plain unto all those that are filled with the spirit of prophecy."⁷

Revelations and prophecy, just as scripture, must be read with the inspiration of the Holy Ghost to receive a full understanding. Without this inspiration it is not possible to truly understand the revelations and prophecies that have been given. In contrast, if we have the spirit of the Holy Ghost it is promised that "God shall give unto you knowledge by his Holy Spirit, yea, by the unspeakable gift of the Holy Ghost, that has not been revealed since the world was until now."⁸

Summary of Prophetic Standards

In summary, for an alleged prophecy to be accepted as part of the canon of the Church and to be binding upon the membership, it must meet three criteria:

1. It must be received by the President of the Church.
2. It must be approved by the First Presidency and the Quorum of Twelve.

3. It must be presented to and accepted by the membership of the Church.

In the past century there have only been two revelations that have been given and accepted as canon by the Church. It is clear that the established pattern was followed in both cases.

- ***Vision of the Redemption of the Dead.***

After a considerable period of study and consideration of the scriptures President Joseph F. Smith received the revelation known as the Vision of the Redemption of the Dead on October 3, 1918. He submitted it to the First Presidency and the Quorum of Twelve Apostles for their approval on October 31 and it was published in the *Improvement Era* in the December 1918 issue. For the next sixty years the revelation was used regularly in the Church and was considered true, but it was for some reason not included in the authoritative canon of the Church. On March 25, 1976 it was approved by the First Presidency and the Quorum of Twelve for inclusion in the Pearl of Great Price and was accepted by the membership of the Church in General Conference on April 3, 1976.⁹ In June 1979 it became Section 138 of the Doctrine and Covenants.

- ***Revelation on the Priesthood.*** The second revelation concerned the Revelation on the Priesthood. After President Spencer W. Kimball had spent considerable time in study and pondering the subject he received a revelation that the Priesthood should be extended to all worthy males. He submitted it for approval to the First Presidency and then on June 1, 1978 he met with the First Presidency and the Quorum of Twelve in the temple. After leading them in prayer and asking for confirmation of the revelation he had received, the revelation was approved. On September 30, 1978 the revelation was presented in General Conference for acceptance by the membership of the Church. It was approved unanimously.¹⁰

The interpretation, and understanding, of the prophecy or revelation must be consistent with the same revelatory spirit that gave the revelation in the first place. It can only be understood through personal revelation.

The pattern for receiving and accepting revelation for the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints is clear and will be followed in each case before a revelation is binding upon the membership as a whole.

THE TEXT OF THE WHITE HORSE PROPHECY

In 1843 Edwin Rushton and Theodore Turley were with Joseph Smith when, according to their account, the Prophet gave what has become known as the White Horse Prophecy. In the mid 1850s Brothers Rushton and Turley were of advanced age and in the interest of preserving history were asked to write down their recollections of the 1843 prophecy. Different individuals recorded the two men's account of the White Horse Prophecy for their own use. Several copies of these accounts are in the Church Historian's Office. They reportedly vary slightly in a few words but are remarkably consistent in content.¹¹

The following is a copy reportedly from the journal of John J. Roberts, Paradise, Utah. It is readily available from several Websites, none of which report a source for their copy other than the unpublished diary. The connection between John J. Roberts and the two who reported the conversation (Edwin Rushton and Theodore Turley) is not clear to me, nor have I personally seen the journal entry herein quoted. It is apparently a record of what Mr. Roberts heard in the 1850s. The provenance of this report has not been established.

The Roberts diary entry follows:

On about the 6th of May, 1843, a Grand Review of the Nauvoo Legion was held in Nauvoo. The Prophet Joseph Smith complimented them for their good discipline and evolutions performed. The weather being hot, he called for a glass of water. With the glass of water in hand, he said: "I will drink to your toast to the overthrow of the Mobocrats," which he did in the following language:

"Here's wishing they were in the middle of the sea in a stone canoe with iron paddles and that a shark swallowed the canoe and the Devil swallowed the shark and himself locked up in the northwest corner of Hell, the key lost and a blind man hunting it."

The next morning a man who heard the Prophet give the toast returned to visit the mansion of the Prophet and so abused him with bad language that he was ordered out by the Prophet. It was while the two were out that my attention was attracted to them, and hearing the man speaking in a loud tone of voice, I went towards them, the man finally leaving. There were then present the Prophet, Theodore Turley and myself [Edwin Rushton]. The Prophet began talking to us of the mobbings and deriding and per-

secutions we as a people had endured, "but we will have worse things to see. Our persecutors will have all the mobbings they want. Don't wish them any harm, for when you see their sufferings you will shed bitter tears for them."

While this conversation was going on we stood by his south wicket gate in a triangle. Turning to me, he said, "I want to tell you something of the future. I will speak in a parable like unto John the Revelator. You will go to the Rocky Mountains and you will be a great and mighty people established there, which I will call the White Horse of peace and safety." When the Prophet said, "You will see it," I said, "Where will you be at that time?" He said, "I shall never go there. Your enemies will continue to follow you with persecutions and they will make obnoxious laws against you in Congress to destroy the White Horse, but you will have a friend or two to defend you and throw out the worst parts of the law so they will not hurt you so much. You must continue to petition Congress all the time, but they will treat you like strangers and aliens and they will not give you your rights, but will govern you with strangers and commissioners. You will see the Constitution of the United States almost destroyed. It will hang like a thread as fine as a silk fiber." At that time the Prophet's countenance became sad, because as he said, "I love the Constitution; it was made by the inspiration of God; and it will be preserved and saved by the efforts of the White Horse, and by the Red Horse who will combine in its defense. The White Horse will find the mountains full of minerals and they will become rich (at this time, it must be remembered, the precious metals were not known to exist in either the Rocky Mountains or California). You will see silver piled up in the streets. You will see the gold shoveled up like sand. Gold will be of little value then, even in a mercantile capacity; for the people of the world will have something else to do in seeking for salvation. The time will come when the banks of every nation will fall and only two places will be safe where people can deposit their gold and treasure. This place will be the White Horse and England's vaults. A terrible revolution will take place in the land of America, such as has never been seen before; for the land will be left without a Supreme Government, and every specie of wickedness will be practiced rampantly in the land. Father will be against son and son against father; mother against daughter and daughter against mother. The most terrible scenes of bloodshed, murder and rape that have ever been imagined or looked

upon will take place. People will be taken from the earth and there will be peace and love only in the Rocky Mountains. This will cause many hundreds of thousands of the honest in heart of the world to gather there, not because they would be Saints, but for safety and because they will be so numerous that you will be in danger of famine, but not for want of seed, time and harvest, but because of so many to be fed. Many will come with bundles under their arms to escape the calamities for there will be no escape except only by escaping and fleeing to Zion. Those that come to you will try to keep the laws and be one with you for they will see your unity and the greatness of your organization. The Turkish Empire of the Crescent will be the first power to be disputed, for freedom must be given for the Gospel to be preached in the Holy Land. The Lord took of the best blood of the nations and planted them on the small islands now called England and Great Britain and gave them power in the nations for a thousand years and their power will continue with them that they may keep the balance of power; and they will keep Russia from sweeping her power over the world. England and France are now bitter enemies but they will be allied together and be united to keep Russia from conquering the world. The two popes, Greek and Catholic, will eventually come together in their decline and be united. The Protestant Religions do not know how much they are indebted to Henry VIII for throwing off the Pope's bill and establishing the Protestant faith. He was the only monarch who could do so at that time and he did it because the nation was at his back to sustain him. One of the peculiar features in England is the established Red-coat; a uniform making so remarkable a target to shoot at, and yet they have conquered wherever they have gone. The reason for this will be known to them some day as red is seen in a different color threading through under all history. The lion and the unicorn of England comes from there being so much blood of Israel in the nation. While the terrible things of which I have mentioned are going on, England will be neutral until it becomes so inhuman that she will interfere to stop the shedding of blood and history will be more properly understood. England and France will unite together to make peace, not to subdue the nations. She will find this nation so broken up and so many claiming government, till there will be no reasonable government. Then it will appear to the other nations, or powers, as though England had taken possession of the country. The Black Horse will flee to the invaders and will join them

for they have fear of becoming slaves again; knowing that England did not believe in slavery, they will flee to them that they believe will make them safe. Armed with British bayonets, the doings of the Black Horse will be terrible." Here the Prophet said that he could not bear to look longer upon the scenes as shown to him in vision and he asked the Lord to close the scenes.

Continuing, he said: "During this time the Great White Horse will have gathered strength, sending out elders to gather the honest in heart from among the Pale Horse, or people of the United States, to stand by the Constitution of the United States as it was given by the inspiration of God. In these days which are yet to come God will set up a Kingdom never to be thrown down, but other Kingdoms to come into it, and those Kingdoms that will not let the Gospel be preached in their lands will be humbled until they will."

"England the Germany, Norway, Denmark, Switzerland, Holland and Belgium have a considerable amount of the blood of Israel among the people which must be gathered out. Those nations will submit to the nations of God. England will be the last of the nations to surrender, but when she does she will do it as a whole in comparison as she threw off the Catholic power. The nobility knows that the gospel is true, but it has not pomp enough, and grandeur and influence for them to yet embrace it. They are proud and will not acknowledge the Kingdom of God or come into it until they see the power it will have. Peace and safety in the Rocky Mountains will be protected by the Guardians, the White and Red Horses. The coming of the Messiah among his people will be so natural that only those who see him will know that he has come, but he will come and give his laws unto Zion and minister unto his people. This will not be his coming in the clouds of Heaven to take vengeance on the wicked of the world."

"The temple in Jackson county, Missouri, will be built in that generation. The saints will think that there will not be time to build it, but with all the help you can receive, you can put up a great temple quickly. You will have all the gold, silver and precious stones you need, for these things will only be for the beautifying of the temple. Also, all the skilled mechanics you want and the Ten Tribes of Israel will help build it. When you see this land bound with iron, you may look forward to Jackson county."

At this point, he made a pause, and looking up as though the vision were still in view, he said:

“There is a land beyond the Rocky Mountains that will be invaded by the heathen Chinese unless great care and protection be given.” Speaking of the heathen nations, he said: “Where there is no law there is no condemnation; this will apply to them. Power will be given to the White Horse to rebuke the nations afar off, and you obey it, for the laws go forth from Zion. The last great struggle that Zion will ever have to contend with will be when the whole of America will be made the Zion of God. Those opposing will be called Gog and Magog. The nations of the earth will be led by the Russian Czar and his power will be great, but all opposition will be overcome and this land will be the Zion of our God. Amen.”¹²

SUMMARY OF THE WHITE HORSE PROPHECY

The primary message recorded in John Roberts' diary is that there will be great confusion, revolution, and wickedness in the last days prior to the coming of the Savior in glory. The idea of turmoil and trouble and great tribulation in the last days is not a new concept in the LDS Church, and it is a common theme found in most Christian religions. The idea of different groups identified as the four horses, is an unusual application but still has a familiar ring to it. According to the diary:

- The White Horse is identified as the people in the Rocky Mountains who will establish Zion.
- The Pale Horse is identified as the people of the United States.
- The Red Horse is not specifically identified, except as a powerful group that will play a significant role in the last days.
- The Black Horse is not identified except as a force.

During this latter-day turmoil the people of the White Horse group will become rich and powerful and will see many come to them for safety. This seems to relate to the concept of the establishment of Zion and is spoken of in many places separate from the text of the prophecy. The idea of trouble in the last days and the establishment of Zion are not anything new either to Joseph Smith, the Church, or, for that matter, the world in general.

A secondary message, contained in and resulting from the first, is that during this time the Constitution and government of the United States will be in great jeop-

ardy, such that its safety and probable continuance can be compared to the risk of hanging “like a thread as fine as a silk fiber.” The implication is that if the thread were to break it would mean the destruction of the Constitution and the government of the United States. Nevertheless, the Constitution will be saved by the combined actions of the people in the Rocky Mountains (the White Horse) and an unidentified but powerful group (the Red Horse). It is not, as some have reported, a man on a white horse that will come forward to save the Constitution. There is no mention of anything like this, as can be confirmed by reading the text. It is the people of the Rocky Mountains that will act to save the Constitution.

It is this part of the “prophecy” that is apparently given the greatest attention by leaders of the Church and other commentators. It would seem that with the turmoil in the world it would be natural that the United States would be involved and experience challenges as a result. The unusual wording describing the condition of the United States and the Constitution is what has kept interest in the White Horse Prophecy alive. The idea of “hanging by a thread” has become part of the literature and lore of the LDS community.

CREDIBILITY OF THE WHITE HORSE PROPHECY

Is this prophecy something that can be relied upon? Can it be read with credibility and confidence? Although it may have true elements contained in the text as recorded in the diary, it nevertheless is not something members of the Church of Jesus Christ consider canon or scripture. Nor is belief in the details binding upon members of the Church. Why is this so?

The character and personal integrity of the men who recorded the prophecy is not in question. Both Edwin Rushton and Theodore Turley were supporters of the Prophet Joseph Smith. They both emigrated to the Salt Lake Valley and were active supporters of the Church until their respective deaths.¹³

It is important to remember that the credibility of the text is suspect from the very first. It was recorded ten years after the original conversation between the Prophet and the two men. It was never corroborated by the Prophet, and he never confirmed that the text correctly transmitted what he said or intended. By the time the prophecy was shared by the individuals who heard it, the Prophet had been dead for ten years. It is dependent upon the memory of the two men and their ability to accurately report the details a decade later. It was a private conversation between the Prophet and two other

men, and there is no reason to believe it was intended for use by the Church as a whole. That does not mean that the statements contained in the prophecy are not true, rather that they are at best unreliable and unconfirmed.

Also, the prophecy has not gone through the procedure for canonization or acceptance by the Church as a whole. The President of the Church has not acted to confirm the truth of the text. The Quorum of the Twelve has not acted to communicate the validity of the prophecy. The Church as a whole has not had the opportunity to consider and accept the prophecy as scripture and therefore binding.

Finally, authorities of the Church have denounced portions of the account. In General Conference in October 1918 Joseph Fielding Smith made the following comments:

I have discovered that people have copies of a purported vision by the Prophet Joseph Smith given in Nauvoo, and some people are circulating this supposed vision, or revelation, or conversation which the prophet is reported to have held with a number of individuals in the city of Nauvoo. I want to say to you, my brethren and sisters, that if you understand the Church articles and covenants, if you will read the scriptures and become familiar with those things which are recorded in the revelations from the Lord, it will not be necessary for you to ask any questions in regard to the authenticity or otherwise of any purported revelation, vision, or manifestation that proceeds out of darkness, concocted in some corner, surreptitiously presented, and not coming through the proper channels of the Church. Let me add that when a revelation comes for the guidance of this people, you may be sure that it will not be presented in some mysterious manner contrary to the order of the Church. It will go forth in such form that the people will understand that it comes from those who are in authority, for it will be sent either to the presidents of stakes and the bishops of the wards over the signatures of the presiding authorities, Or it will be published in some of the regular papers or magazines under the control and direction of the Church or it will be presented before such a gathering as this, at a general conference. It will not spring up in some distant part of the Church and be in the hands of some obscure individual without authority, and thus be circulated among the Latter-day Saints. Now, you may remember this.¹⁴

His father and President of the Church, Joseph F. Smith, followed immediately after his speech and 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 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.¹⁵

Elder Bruce R McConkie also comments on the “prophecy” in his book *Mormon Doctrine*:

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.¹⁶

He then quotes President Joseph F. Smith’s comments.

Note that the substance of the condemnation is that some thoughts or sentences from one source or another may have been put together to form this so-called revelation. The memory of the men involved may not have been sufficient to remember all that occurred in the short conversation they reportedly had with the Prophet. It is likely that they had parts from here and parts from there that formed the basis of their memory of the event. Note also that it is the descriptions of the various horses and what they represent that are condemned as false. In addition, the details of the last days are also declared false.

It is clear that the text of the White Horse Prophecy as reported by Theodore Turley and Edwin Rushton and recorded in the diary of John J. Roberts is not accepted as verified, binding prophecy by The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. It has never been accepted and it has been soundly denounced. The acceptability

of the document should not be an issue with any commentator. No authority of the Church has ever spoken in support of this document—not once! This really is not an issue that can responsibly come up in any discussion regarding the Church of Jesus Christ.

CREDIBILITY OF THE CONCEPT THAT THE CONSTITUTION WILL HANG BY A THREAD

The idea of the “hanging by the thread” is not mentioned, pro or con, in either President Smith’s or Elder McConkie’s comments. Furthermore, my research has shown that this idea has been accepted and commented on favorably by many authorities in the Church. While the commonly reported text of the White Horse Prophecy is condemned as false and unreliable, the idea of the thread and the Constitution can be demonstrated to have come from other, more reliable sources than the White Horse Prophecy.

Some critics suggest that if Church authorities speak favorably of the concept of the Constitution hanging by a thread, as contained in the text of the White Horse Prophecy, then the entire prophecy must be accepted. This is a logical fallacy, as the credibility of these comments is dependent upon entirely different sources. It is possible that the source for the White Horse Prophecy is one or more of the other sources. It is entirely consistent to accept the favorable comments by Church leaders regarding the single concept of the Constitution hanging by a thread while denying the credibility of the White Horse Prophecy as a whole.

In 1839 the Latter-day Saints began moving into Hancock County, Illinois where they established the city of Nauvoo on the banks of the Mississippi River. Martha Jane Knowlton was living in the area with her family at that time and became acquainted with the Saints. She was baptized in January 1840 and was so convinced of the Prophet Joseph Smith’s divine calling that she recorded every speech she ever heard the Prophet deliver. At this time there was no systematic procedure in the Church for the reporting of the speeches of Joseph Smith or other Church leaders. Many were preserved by the efforts of individual members of the Church. The following speech was delivered shortly after Joseph Smith had returned from an unfruitful trip to Washington, DC on July 19, 1840, and was recorded by Sister Knowlton.

Read a chap[ter] in [Ezekiel] concluding with this saying: And when all these things come to pass and Lo they will come then shall you know that a Prophet hath been among you.

Afterwards read the parable of the 12 olive trees and said speaking of the Land of Zion, It consists of all[N[orth] & [S]outh] America but that any place where the Saints gather is Zion which every righteous man will build up for a place of safety for his children. The olive trees are 12 stakes which are yet to be built not the Temple in Jackson [County, Missouri] as some suppose. For while the 12 stakes are being built we will be at peace but the Nations of the Earth will be at war.

We shall build the Zion of the Lord in peace until 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 peices 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.¹⁷

From Knowlton’s record it is clear that the idea of the Constitution being challenged was introduced in 1840, well before the reported date of the conversation resulting in the White Horse Prophecy. Orson Hyde, an apostle who was also there when Joseph made his remarks, stated:

It is said that Brother Joseph in his lifetime declared that the Elders of this Church should step forth at a particular time when the Constitution should be in danger, and rescue it, and save it. This may be so; but I do not recollect that he said exactly so. 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.¹⁸

As is apparent from these reports the Prophet spoke in 1840 of the dangers that would befall the United States and of the threat to the Constitution. It is also apparent that the memories of the event have differing details of the speech, but contain the essence of the prophecy regarding the Constitution.

On May 6, 1843 on the prairie east of Nauvoo a parade of the Nauvoo Legion was conducted. This was the day before the reported conversation that has come to be known as the White Horse Prophecy. On this day there was a substantial gathering with several non-Mormon government officials present.

James Burgess, a member of the Church, arrived in Nauvoo in April 1843. It is apparent that he was present at the review and heard the remarks of the Prophet that day. An account of the Prophet's speech by James Burgess contains much the same language the Prophet is reported to have used in the 1840 account by Martha Jane Knowlton:

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 han[gl] 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.¹⁹

The reports of both the 1840 and the 1843 speeches suggest that the topic was the turmoil and difficulties the people would face in the last days, including challenges to the Constitution. However, no one else records anything to do with White, Pale, Red, or Black horses or the details reported by Turley and Rushton. The challenges coming in the last days were a common theme for many of the speeches during that turbulent time and became a common theme for speakers in the Church for some time after.

Thus, there is much support for the idea that Joseph Smith spoke of the challenges to the Constitution coming from sources and witnesses that are more reliable than the Turley and Rushton account. Original manuscripts of the Knowlton account and the Burgess notebook are held in the Church Archives.

WILL THE LDS TAKE OVER THE GOVERNMENT?

There are some who feel that these statements, reported by others to be by Joseph Smith, somehow constitute a threat to the United States and that they show a tendency on the part of the Latter day Saints to expect to

somehow take over and establish not only a new United States government, but also to take their rule to a world-wide government. Nothing could be further from the truth. There is nothing in any of the reports, including the discounted Turley and Rushton account, to suggest such a thing. The facts and the historical statements by the authorities of the Church show the exact opposite to be their expectations.

Historically, support for the Constitution of the United States has been high from every leader and President of the Church from Joseph Smith to Gordon B. Hinckley.²⁰ A few of the very many quotes in support of the Constitution and the idea that the Saints will be the ones to save the Constitution at the time of national crisis are listed below. After reviewing many, many such quotes I can assure you that these are representative of every other such comment made by a leader of the Church. Not one has ever been found that would suggest that the Church would ever find itself in a position to take over the country or world government. When the Savior returns, He will set up the kind of government that will suit the needs of the world at that time, but that is an entirely different issue than taking over the government prior to that time.

Several quotations from Church leaders will establish that the expectation is that the Constitution of the United States will continue, even as it goes through a period of challenge. There is no expectation of the Constitution being replaced by a government to be established by the elders of the Church.

In an Independence Day celebration speech in the Salt Lake Tabernacle on July 4, 1854, Brigham Young said:

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.²¹

President David O. McKay said in an editorial in *The Instructor* (an official Church magazine) in 1956:

Next to being one in worshipping God there is nothing in this world upon which this Church should be more united than in upholding and defending the Constitution of the United States.²²

George Q. Cannon, speaking in the Salt Lake Assembly Hall on November 20, 1881, said:

The day will come—and this is another prediction of Joseph Smith’s—I want to remind you of it, my brethren and sisters, when good government, constitutional government-liberty-will be found among the Latter-day Saints, and it will be sought for in vain elsewhere; when the Constitution of this land and republican government and institutions will be upheld by this people who are now so oppressed and whose destruction is now sought so diligently. The day will come when the Constitution, and free government under it, will be sustained and preserved by this people.²³

Joseph Smith, while unjustly imprisoned in Liberty Jail, wrote the members of the Church on March 25, 1839 and taught that:

The Constitution of the United States is a glorious standard; it is founded in the wisdom of God. It is a heavenly banner; it is to all those who are privileged with the sweets of its liberty, like the cooling shades and refreshing waters of a great rock in a thirsty and weary land. It is like a great tree under whose branches men from every clime can be shielded from the burning rays of the sun.²⁴

In the Doctrine and Covenants we learn:

Have mercy, O Lord, upon all the nations of the earth; have mercy upon the rulers of our land; may those principles, which were so honorably and nobly defended, namely, the Constitution of our land, by our fathers, be established forever.²⁵

Ezra Taft Benson said in General Conference October 1961:

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.

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.”

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.²⁶

President John Taylor, while in Logan, Utah spoke on Sunday afternoon, August 31, 1879 and said:

The day is not far distant when this nation will be shaken from centre to circumference. And now, you may write it down, any of you, and I will prophesy it in the name of God. And then will be fulfilled that prediction to be found in one of the revelations given through the Prophet Joseph Smith. Those who will not take up their sword to fight against their neighbor must needs flee to Zion for safety. And they will come, saying, we do not know anything of the principles of your religion, but we perceive that you are an honest community; you administer justice and righteousness, and we want to live with you and receive the protection of your laws, but as for your religion we will talk about that some other time. Will we protect such people? Yes, all honorable men. 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, and extending the hand of fellowship to the oppressed of all nations. This is part of the programme, and as long as we do what is right and fear God, he will help us and stand by us under all circumstances.²⁷

Joseph F Smith in General Conference October 1912 said:

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.²⁸

Can there be any doubt in the mind of any honest investigator that the Constitution of the United States holds a special place in the hearts and minds of Latter-day Saints? In every instance when the speaker refers to the Constitution “hanging by a thread,” he also refers to the continuation of the government and the Constitution of the United States. It cannot possibly be inferred in any instance that the government will be overthrown by or changed in any manner so as to allow the Elders of the LDS Church to take over the government. It is true, however, that it is prophesied in every instance that the Elders of the Church will act to protect and preserve the Constitution.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

It cannot be said that The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints accepts the White Horse Prophecy as official or binding. It also is true that nothing in the so-called prophecy is quoted or used by authorities in the Church. It is true that there is language the so-called prophecy that is found elsewhere in historically verifiable records.

The prophecy that contains the concept of the Constitution of the United States being challenged and then saved by the Elders of the Church is accepted as a prophecy of Joseph Smith. There is evidence that he repeated it more than once and it was commonly understood and accepted. It has been quoted many times by leaders of the Church. It is nevertheless not part of the Church canon and is therefore not binding upon the membership of the Church as a whole.

It is very clear that The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints does not believe that there will be a time when the government of the United States or the world will be assumed by the Church or its members. Rather it is the clear expectation that the Constitution and the government of the United States will survive the future predicted crisis because of the support that will be given by the Elders of the Church.

NOTES

1. James E. Talmage, *Articles of Faith* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Co., 1981), 268–283.

2. Joseph Smith, *History of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints*, 7 vols., introduction and notes by B.H. Roberts (Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1932–1951), 6:58.

3. Doctrine and Covenants 43:2–7.

4. Doctrine and Covenants 28:13.

5. 2 Peter 1:19–21.

6. Stephen L. Richards, *Conference Report* (October 1951): 116–117

7. 2 Nephi 25:4.

8. Doctrine and Covenants 121:26.

9. N. Eldon Tanner, “The Sustaining of Church Officers,” *Ensign* (May 1976): 18.

10. N. Eldon Tanner, “Revelation on Priesthood Accepted, Church Officers Sustained,” *Ensign* (November 1978): 16.

11. From a brief telephone conversation held December 17, 2002 with Duane Crowther, Bountiful, Utah regarding his recollection of research he did in the 1960s. See also Duane Crowther, *Prophecy, Key to the Future* (Bountiful, Utah: Horizon Publishers, 1962), 297–322.

12. Author unknown. “A War Prophecy or the White Horse” <<http://www.2eternity.com/mormon/whitehorse.html#anchor349376>> (December 10, 2003).

13. Frank Esshom, *Pioneers and Prominent Men of Utah*, (Salt Lake City: Utah Pioneers Book Publishing Company, 1913), 1145, 1218.

14. Joseph F. Smith, Jr., *Conference Report* (October 1918): 55. (Joseph F. Smith, Jr. was later known as Joseph Fielding Smith.)

15. Joseph F. Smith, *Conference Report* (October 1918): 58.

16. Bruce R. McConkie, *Mormon Doctrine*, Second edition (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1966), 835.

17. Martha Jane Knowlton Coray, *Martha Jane Knowlton Coray Notebook*, kept at the Historical Department, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Salt Lake City, Utah, as reported in Dean C. Jesse, “The Historians Corner,” *BYU Studies*, 19/3 (Spring 1979): 390–394.

18. Orson Hyde, “Self-Government, Etc.,” *Journal of Discourses*, reported by G.D. Watt 3 January 1858, Vol. 6 (London: Latter-Day Saint’s Book Depot, 1859), 152.

19. James Burgess, *James Burgess Notebook*, kept at the Historical Department, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Salt Lake City, Utah, as reported in Joseph Smith, *The Words of Joseph Smith: The Contemporary Accounts of the Nauvoo Discourses of the Prophet Joseph*, compiled and edited by Andrew F. Ehat and Lyndon W. Cook (Provo, Utah: BYU Religious Studies Center, 1980), 280.

20. For further information regarding the Church and the Constitution see Dallin H. Oaks, “The Divinely Inspired Constitution,” *Ensign* (November 1987): 4; J. Keith Melville, “Joseph Smith, the Constitution and Individual Liberties,” *BYU Studies* 28/2 (1987): 65; Noel B. Reynolds, “The Doctrine of an Inspired Constitution,” *BYU Studies* 16/3 (1987): 15; Lynn D.

Wardle, "Seeing the Constitution as Covenant," *Ensign* (September 1989): 7.

21. Brigham Young, "Celebration of the Fourth of July," *Journal of Discourses*, reported by G.D. Watt 4 July 1854, Vol. 7 (London: Latter-Day Saint's Book Depot, 1860), 15.

22. David O. McKay, *The Instructor* (February, 1956): 34.

23. George Q. Cannon, "Peace and Prosperity of the Saints, Etc.," *Journal of Discourses*, reported by John Irvine 10 November 1881, Vol. 18 (London: Latter-Day Saint's Book Depot, 1883), 104.

24. Joseph Smith, *History of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints*, 7 vols., introduction and notes by B.H. Roberts (Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1932–1951), 3: 304.

25. Doctrine & Covenants 109:54.

26. Ezra Taft Benson, *Conference Report* (October 1961): 70.

27. John Taylor, "The Object of Gathering, Etc.," *Journal of Discourses*, reported by George F. Gibbs 31 August 1879, Vol. 18 (London: Latter-Day Saint's Book Depot, 1881), 8.

28. Joseph F. Smith., *Conference Report* (October 1912): 10–11.

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