

JOSEPH SMITH'S PROPHECY
THAT THE CONSTITUTION WOULD HANG BY A THREAD

by Preston Nibley

[In December 1948, when I was a child attending Primary, the church published a broadside with the photographs of the general authorities on one side (George Albert Smith was then President of the Church), and a statement by Preston Nibley on the other. I was given my copy in Primary, as I suppose everyone else in the church was also. The broadside is now very rare, so the chances of your having seen it are remote enough that it probably will not be a redundancy to include a copy of Elder Nibley's short statement here. LLB]

WHAT OF JOSEPH SMITH'S PROPHECY THAT THE CONSTITUTION WOULD HANG BY A THREAD?

by Preston Nibley

FREQUENT INQUIRY is received as to the validity of the great prophecy, said to have been made by the Prophet Joseph Smith that the time would come when the Constitution would hang by a single thread, and at that particular time the Mormon people would step forth and save it from destruction.

For a number of years I have searched through the writings and sermons of the Prophet, but to date I have not found any record of the above prophecy as having been recorded by the Prophet himself, or by those who worked with him in his office and assisted him in writing his history.

The first reference to substantiate important prophecy was given in a sermon by President Brigham Young in the old Tabernacle on the Temple Block, on July 4, 1854. The occasion was the celebration of Independence Day by the people of Salt Lake City. President Young was the principal speaker.

Following are a few excerpts from his sermon:

"The general Constitution of our country is good, and a wholesome government could be framed upon it; for it was dictated by the invisible operations of the Almighty. He moved upon Columbus to launch forth upon the trackless deep to discover the American continent. He moved upon the signers of the Declaration of Independence, and he moved upon Washington to fight and conquer, in the same way that he has moved upon ancient and modern prophets, each being inspired to accomplish the particular work he was called to perform, in the times seasons and dispensations of the Almighty....

"If the framers of the Constitution and the inhabitants of the United States had walked humbly, the God who defended them and fought their battles when Washington was on the stage of action, the nation would have now been free from a multitude of evils.

"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 this nation will hang upon a single thread, and at this critical juncture, this people will step forth and save it from the threatened destruction.' It will be so." (Journal History, July 4, 1854)

President Brigham Young does not give the citation of his information regarding this important propheet, whether it came to him direct from the Prophet Joseph Smith or not, but he states it in such a bold, fearles manner that it is evident that he knew exactly what he was talking about.

On February 6 and 7 of the following year, 1855, a celebration was held in the Social Hall, by the surviving members of the Mormon Battalion to commemorate their long march to the Pacific, made in 1846-47. On this occasion President Jediah M. Grant made a few appropriate remarks. Among other things he siad:

"We are friendly to our country and when we speak of the flag or our Union, we love it, and we love the rights the Constitution guarantees to every citizen. What did the Prophet Joseph say? When the Constitution shall be tottering, we shall be the people to save it from the hand of the foe." (The Mormon Battalion by Tyler, page 350).

Three years later, on January 3, 1858, Orson Hyde was speaking in the old Tabernacle in

Salt Lake City. At that time he made this significant statement, which he worded somewhat differently than the two speakers quoted above.

“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." (Journal of Discourses. Vol.6:152).

It appears from the above that Orson Hyde heard the Prophet Joseph Smith make the prophecy quoted, though he differs somewhat from Brigham Young and Jedediah Grant in his understanding of the same. However, we have a statement from Eliza R. Snow, that she actually heard the Prophet make the remarks which she quotes. The following is from the Deseret News Weekly of Jan. 19, 1870, page 556. It is the report of a meeting of the women of Salt Lake City, held in the new Tabernacle.

Eliza R. Snow was speaking:

"My sisters, my remarks in conclusion will be brief. I heard the Prophet Joseph Smith say if the people rose up and mobbed us, and the authorities countenanced it, they would have mobs to their hearts content. I heard him say that the time would come when this nation would so far depart from its original purity, its glory and its love for freedom, and its protection of civil rights and religious rights, that the Constitution of our country would hang as it were by a thread. He said also that this people, the Sons of Zion, would rise up and save the Constitution and bear it off triumphant'."

From all the above it is abundantly evident that the Prophet Joseph Smith did make the marvelous prediction that it is the destiny of the Latter-day Saints to some day save the Constitution of the United States from destruction.