

## Missouri Myths by Graham W. Doxey

Missouri from the time of the settlement of Ad-am-ondi-Ahman has been a place dear to the Saints' hearts, a place important in our history and important in our future. But its vivid and turbulent history has produced myths that sometimes parallel the prophecies of its future until it is difficult to untangle what the Lord has told us from "things we've heard all our lives." For instance:

Myth #1: We're going to walk to Missouri to prepare for the Second Coming. Scripture makes it clear that Missouri has a prophetic role to play in the Second Coming and it seems logical that some people will need to go there to assist in portions of that work. But the scriptures contain no references that spell out in detail how that assistance will be given.

One of the quotations I hear frequently repeated is part of a sermon by Joseph F. Smith in 1882: "When God leads the people back to Jackson County, how will he do it? Let me picture to you how some of us may be gathered and led to Jackson County. I think I see two or three hundred thousand people wending their way across the great plain enduring the nameless hardships of the journey, herding and guarding their cattle by day and by night. ... This is one way to look at it. It is certainly a practical view. Some might ask, what will become of the railroads? I fear that the sifting process would be insufficient were we to travel by railroads." (Journal of Discourses, 24:156–57.)

This is a vivid mental picture, but people frequently remember the picture and forget he said "some of us" and "may be gathered." We should also keep in mind that he said this is "one way to look at it," remembering also the perspective of 1882. From our perspective in 1979, it seems even less likely that we would sell our automobiles and herd cattle along our freeway systems. But we simply have no scriptural information about who—if any general Church members—will be called to go back and the means that they might use. The prophets of our day have not found it timely or necessary to speak on the matter.

Myth #2: The entire Church will be gathered to Missouri. Here recent prophets have been quite specific. President Spencer W. Kimball said in October Conference, 1978: "We are building up the strength of Zion—her cords or stakes—throughout the world. Therefore,

we counsel our people to remain in their native lands and gather out the elect of God and teach them the ways of the Lord. There temples are being built and the saints will be blessed wherever they live in all the world." (Ensign, Nov. 1978, p. 76.)

During the time of Joseph Smith and Brigham Young, it was essential for members of the Church to "gather to Zion" for their own spiritual and physical safety. But now that temples, welfare projects, educational facilities, genealogical research libraries, and the blessings of a full church organization in stakes are available, this gathering is no longer required or wise. And although the Church purchased some Clay County land last December, it was solely for investment purposes—not for other Church use. At a general conference, President Harold B. Lee stressed the point made by Elder Bruce R. McConkie at the Mexico City Area Conference: "The place of gathering for the Mexican Saints is in Mexico; ... and so it goes throughout the length and breadth of the whole earth. Japan is for the Japanese; Korea is for the Koreans; Australia is for the Australians; every nation is the gathering place for its own people." (Ensign, July 1973, p. 5.)

Of course, there will be special functions of the temple in Jackson County, but worldwide gatherings of the Saints to Missouri may not be necessary, or desired—after all, the mission of members is to always share the gospel with the nonmembers who surround them throughout the world, and this activity will undoubtedly continue after the Second Coming. Elder Harold B. Lee further cautioned the Saints in all lands to be guided by the current prophet, not by rumor or supposition, and "look forward to the instruction that shall come to them from the First Presidency of this Church as to where they shall be gathered and not be disturbed in their feelings until such instruction is given to them as it is revealed by the Lord to the proper authority" (In Conference Report, Apr. 1948, p. 55).

Myth #3: But won't there be immense destructions in Missouri preceding the Second Coming, so extensive that "not a yellow dog will be left to wag his tail"? It's true that destruction throughout the earth is one of the conditions prior to the Second Coming. Yet as far as destruction in Missouri is concerned there are two schools of thought among members.

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One believes that it has already taken place. Elder B. H. Roberts published a reported prophecy of Joseph Smith to Alexander Doniphan, his lawyer in Missouri. According to Doniphan's brother-in-law, writing the incident over seventy years after it occurred, Joseph Smith warned Doniphan that "God's wrath hangs over Jackson County ... and you will live to see the day when it will be visited by fire and sword. The fields and farms and houses will be destroyed, and only the chimneys will be left to mark the desolation."

"General Doniphan said to me," his brother-in-law continued, "that the devastation of Jackson county [during the Civil War] forcibly reminded him of this remarkable prediction." Elder Roberts cites additional descriptions of Jackson County's role during the Civil War as fulfillment of this prophecy. (See *Comprehensive History of the Church*, 1:538–59; italics added.)

The other school of thought on the so-called "yellow dog" prophecy is that some members feel it is yet to occur. However, a study of the supposed source of the prophecy is helpful. It seems to have originated in a conversation between Heber C. Kimball and Amanda H. Wilcox in Salt Lake City in May 1868. She reports him as saying, "The western boundries of the State of Missouri will be swept so clean of its inhabitants that, as President Young tells us, when we return to that place, 'There will not be left so much as a yellow dog to wag his tail.'" (Prophetic Sayings of Heber C. Kimball to Sister Amanda H. Wilcox, n.p., n.d., p. 6.)

There seem to be a number of questions about the

authenticity of this account since Heber C. Kimball was apparently in Provo, not Salt Lake, during the month of May. Also, no other record exists of Brigham Young making a similar statement. However, it is sufficiently similar to Joseph Smith's statements, except for the "yellow dog," that someone may have remembered the original substance but in the retelling allowed embellishment to creep in.

The above are only three of the myths associated with Missouri's prophetic future. Why did they arise? One reason may be that early Church members, disappointed in their efforts and suffering from their wrongs, welcomed statements describing their future success in Missouri. Another may be that the word-of-mouth method of transmitting much information in the early Church fostered the establishment of casual, and possibly incorrectly heard, remarks as doctrine.

But regardless of our human logic and limited point of view, regardless of what may have been previously repeated innumerable times, we can be sure that the Lord's will on this and all other subjects pertaining to our welfare will be made known through his living prophet. One thing we do know—there is no call to gather to Missouri. And above all, I know that the living prophet's vision is both perfect and sufficient for our day.

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