



Mormonbasics.com is not affiliated with The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. We are a private website, and the comments and opinions expressed here are not from the LDS Church. The opinions expressed in this work are solely the product of this website. If you have comments or suggestions on how we can improve these commentaries in the future, please click [here](#) and leave a comment. This will help us give you the best assistance for your studies in the future.

Mormonbasics.com is humbled to bring you a commentary on the hymns published by the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. This commentary is presented in a two-column format. The original text, as presented in the hymnbook published by the LDS Church, is in the left column. The comments on the right are provided by mormonbasics.com. We have even changed the color of the text so there won't be any question as to who wrote what.

Personal note from the commentator:

The hymns of the Church are sacred text. The Lord has made it very clear to us through his prophets that the singing of hymns is a form of prayer, and as such is sacred communication. Much of the sacred Spirit and reverence we experience in our meetings, especially Sacrament Meeting, comes from the Spirit that accompanies the singing of the hymns.

The hymns are written in poetic form, and as such are able to take certain licenses and liberties with the English language that cannot normally be expressed in any other way. It is certainly not the aim of this commentary to improve on the beauty of the poetic expressions found in our sacred hymns. As a teacher of English to those who speak other languages, I have found that many of the hymns have expressions that are difficult for some people to understand.

Because hymns are written to fit a set rhythmic pattern or meter, often the expression has to be condensed to fit in a small space, but still convey its intended meaning. It is the combination of the rhythm, text, and music that create such a powerful Spiritual experience when singing the hymns. My attempts to explain some of the meaning behind the text should not detract from the original meaning, nor should it replace the original meaning. Hymns, like parables, take on different meanings as the circumstances of our lives change. My commentary is only a starting point for (hopefully) a better understanding of the overall meaning of the hymn in this work. Anyone else writing this same commentary would have different perspectives and points to make. That is the nature of a commentary. I pray that what I say will, in some way, help in your understanding of this hymn. Since this is a personal study of the hymns, I will sometimes use the first person when writing the commentary.

Kelly P. Merrill

Redeemer of Israel

1. Redeemer of Israel,
Our only delight,
On whom for a blessing we call,
Our shadow by day
And our pillar by night,
Our King, our Deliv'rer, our all!

Christ, as the redeemer of Israel is the person who regained possession of our souls (which we lost through sin) by the price He paid through his Atonement. Israel represents those who make covenants with God, and as a result, those who will ultimately be brought back to live with God.

Our Redeemer is all that makes us happy, and we turn to him for our blessings. Like Jesus (Jehovah) protected Israel in the wilderness for forty years by leading them with a pillar cloud (our shadow) during the day, and gave them light to see by in the night with a pillar of fire, He will also lead us and show us the way. He is only our king and the one who delivers or saves us from sin, but he is everything to us.

2. We know he is coming
To gather his sheep
And lead them to Zion in love,
For why in the valley
Of death should they weep
Or in the lone wilderness rove?

This hymn was written before the restoration of the gospel, so it talks about the promises of the Lord being in the future. We now know that the Lord has already come. It happened when he appeared to Joseph Smith. He has already begun the process of gathering his sheep or those who will follow him and allow him to take care of them. He will lead us in love.

The author of this hymn then asks a good question. Why should people have to live without the hope of life (in the valley of death), in sorrow, or wander (rove) in a land of spiritual desolation when their shepherd who loves them and is willing to care for them is coming to lead them to safety and peace? These are the assumptions referred to in this verse.

3. How long we have wandered
As strangers in sin
And cried in the desert for thee!
Our foes have rejoiced
When our sorrows they've seen,
But Israel will shortly be free.

The scriptures tell us that when we enter the waters of baptism we are no more strangers, but fellow citizens with Christ. If you read the scriptures, like Psalms 23, "The Lord is My Shepherd" the image of those who follow Christ is one of being cared for, led to places of safety, and protected by the great shepherd. The opposite of this are those who do not know Christ. They wander in spiritual barrenness, in a spiritual dessert. Many of the are crying or shouting to find their way out of this place of sorrow, but do not know how to get out. The writer of this hymn tells us that we have all wandered in this place of loneliness, and those who would do us harm have been happy over our suffering, but the day will come very soon when we will be free from their bondage. In this case, the writer of the hymn died just nine years before the birth of Joseph Smith.

4. As children of Zion,
Good tidings for us.
The tokens already appear.
Fear not, and be just,
For the kingdom is ours.
The hour of redemption is near.

Zion is the name of God's covenant people. As children of God's covenants this is good news for us. A token is a sign or a proof of something. The signs of these promises being fulfilled are already appearing. Do not be afraid. Be righteous, for the kingdom of God will be ours. We will be redeemed or saved very soon.

5. Restore, my dear Savior,
The light of thy face;

This verse is a request or plea to God to once again show His face to the people. He is saying, in effect, please, dear Savior,

Thy soul-cheering comfort impart;
And let the sweet longing
For thy holy place
Bring hope to my desolate heart.

6. He looks! and ten thousands
Of angels rejoice,
And myriads wait for his word;
He speaks! and eternity,
Filled with his voice,
Re-echoes the praise of the Lord.

MUSIC

Freeman Lewis, 1780-1859

TEXT

William W. Phelps, 1792-1872; adapted from Joseph Swain, 1761-1796. Included in the first LDS hymnbook, 1835.

SCRIPTURES

Exodus 13:21-22, 1 Nephi 22:12

once again show us the beauty of thy face. Impart or give to us your comfort that cheers or makes our souls happy. He admits that his heart feels desolate or abandoned, and he is longing or yearning for the hope that God's holy place will bring to his lonely heart.

The final verse is a declaration of triumph. All God has to do is look and ten thousand angels rejoice, and many wait anxiously for him to speak a word. Then He speaks, and his voice fills all of eternity, which sends back the praises of the Lord again and again.