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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

Adam-ondi-Ahman

1. This earth was once a garden place,
With all her glories common,
And men did live a holy race,
And worship Jesus face to face,
In Adam-ondi-Ahman.

The text of this hymn can be described as a flight of fancy. What it says is not necessarily historically or scripturally accurate, but it does describe the emotional response to wanting to live in a Zion society. William W. Phelps is looking back to the days of Adam and the first patriarchs and imagining what it might have felt like to have lived with such great people as the first prophets. The desire is to have that same society again in the future.

At one point the whole earth was in a state of paradise (a garden place). The phrase “her glories common” could mean a variety of things. It could mean that the beauties of the garden of Eden were found everywhere on earth. It could also be a reference to having things in common, meaning living the law of common consent. I am leaning toward the first meaning.

As a race, men were more holy, because they had not fallen yet into great sin. They were able to walk and talk with the Savior (worship Jesus face to face) because of their personal righteousness in Adam-ondi-Ahman.

2. We read that Enoch walked with God,
Above the pow'r of mammon,
While Zion spread herself abroad,
And Saints and angels sang aloud,
In Adam-ondi-Ahman.

We read (in the scriptures) that Enoch walked with God. He did so because he lived above the “power of mammon” meaning he did not give into the temptations of Satan. During Enoch’s life Zion, the pure in heart multiplied and spread across the land, and both Saints and angels sang aloud in Adam-ondi-Ahman.

3. Her land was good and greatly blest,
Beyond all Israel's Canaan;
Her fame was known from east to west,
Her peace was great, and pure the rest
Of Adam-ondi-Ahman.

The land of Adam-ondi-Ahman was blessed far more than all the blessing God gave to the land of Canaan, which is made up partly from the ancient land of Israel, which the Lord referred to as the promised land. The fame of Adam-ondi-Ahman was known from east to west (basically from one side of the continent to the other). She, meaning the people of Zion, had great peace and pure rest (no contention) in Adam-ondi-Ahman.

4. Hosanna to such days to come,
The Savior's second coming,
When all the earth in glorious bloom
Affords the Saints a holy home,
Like Adam-ondi-Ahman.

Hosanna is a shout of praise to God. We anticipate or hope for such days to come in the future, and shout Hosanna to God as we look forward to that day when the Savior comes again and all the earth is beautiful, like it was in Eden, and the Saints will have a holy home, like they did in Adam-ondi-Ahman.

MUSIC

Anon., Southern Harmony, 1835

TEXT

William W. Phelps, 1792-1872. Included in the first LDS hymnbook, 1835.

SCRIPTURES

Doctrine and Covenants 116:1, Doctrine and

