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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 hymn book 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

Beautiful Zion, Built Above

1. Beautiful Zion, built above;
 Beautiful city that I love;
 Beautiful gates of pearly white;
 Beautiful temple--God its light;
 He who was slain on Calvary
 Opens those pearly gates for me.

There are multiple cities of Zion. Enoch's city was translated and is called the city of Zion. The New Jerusalem in Jackson County, Missouri, USA will also be called Zion. The Jews can refer to Jerusalem as Zion as their gathering place. Finally, the celestial city can be called Zion. There is where we will receive our reward for successfully passing the tests of mortality. This hymn's references appear to be referring to the celestial city of Zion.

The beautiful city of Zion is built in heaven above. This is the beautiful city that I love. The reference to pearly white gates or the "pearly gates" refers to the entrance to the city where God lives. In the temple in this city all light will come from God; there won't be a need for lamps and lights, because all will be brilliantly light by the glory of God. He who was slain on Calvary is Jesus, and it Jesus who will welcome us into the city through those pearly gates.

(Chorus]
 Zion, Zion, lovely Zion;
 Beautiful Zion;
 Zion, city of our God!

2. Beautiful heav'n, where all is light;
 Beautiful angels clothed in white;
 Beautiful strains that never tire;
 Beautiful harps thru all the choir;
 There shall I join the chorus sweet,
 Worshiping at the Savior's feet.

In the celestial city there will be no darkness because it will be filled with the glory of God. All those who live there will wear white. The "strains that never tire" are the singing of hymns and songs. We will never get tired of singing God's praises. A common symbol of heavenly music is the harp, so the hymn talks about those in the heavenly choir holding harps and playing them while singing. The desire is to join the heavenly choir and be able to sing the songs of praise in worshipping our Savior.

3. Beautiful crowns on ev'ry brow;
 Beautiful palms the conq'rors show;
 Beautiful robes the ransomed wear;
 Beautiful all who enter there;
 Thither I press with eager feet;
 There shall my rest be long and sweet.

Each person will wear a crown on their head (brow). All who live there will enter the city like those who conquer a city. A triumphal march into a city used to be done with people waving palm branches for the victors. All we who enter the city will only be there because of Christ's ransoming us from the clutches of death and sin. Each of us will wear beautiful robes. Towards this glorious reward I press forward or live my life in obedience and anticipate the long and sweet (eternal) rest to be enjoyed there.

MUSIC

Joseph G. Fones, 1828-1906

TEXT

George Gill, 1820-1880

SCRIPTURES

Revelation 7:9-17, Revelation 21:2, 21-23