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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

Glorious Things of Thee Are Spoken

1. Glorious things of thee are spoken,
Zion, city of our God!
He whose word cannot be broken
Chose thee for his own abode.
On the Rock of Ages founded,
What can shake our sure repose?
With salvation's wall surrounded,
Thou may'st smile on all thy foes.

2. See! the streams of living waters,
Springing from celestial love,
Well supply thy sons and daughters
And all fear of drought remove.
Round each habitation hov'ring,
See the cloud and fire appear
For a glory and a cov'ring,
Showing that the Lord is near.

3. Blest inhabitants of Zion,
Purchased by the Savior's blood;
Jesus, whom their souls rely on,
Makes them kings and priests to God.
While in love his Saints he raises,
With himself to reign as King,
All, as priests, his solemn praises
For thank-offerings freely bring.

MUSIC

Franz Joseph Haydn, 1732-1809

TEXT

John Newton, 1725-1807. Included in the first LDS hymnbook, 1835.

The text of this hymn refers to the celestial city, which is sometimes referred to as Zion because it is the final destination of those who are pure in heart, the righteous Saints. The first two verses address the city itself, as if addressing a person.

Glorious things are said about you, Zion, the city of our God! He (Christ) whose promises are sure and cannot be broken has chosen you as His place to live, "his own abode." With the city based on Christ (the Rock of Ages), who can disturb our eternal peace (our sure repose)? With Christ's protection (salvation's wall) around us, you, Zion, the city of our God, can smile without fear on your enemies.

When you read the description of the city of God, you will find that water, that element that represents life, comes out of the city from under the throne of God and the Lamb, and has trees of life on both sides of the water, and they never stop bearing fruit. See Revelation 22:1 - 5.

The streams of water that come up from under the throne of God and the Lamb are the waters of life. Jesus taught that those who drink of the water He provides will never thirst again. So all fear of drought (lack of water) are removed because of the pure waters that continually flow from under the throne and down through the city.

In the Old Testament the Lord caused a cloud to cover the children of Israel by day and a pillar of fire to guide them and give them light at night. These are symbols of His constant protection and devotion to His people. This hymn uses these same symbols to express God's protection on each and every household in the city of Zion. This protection shows each person in the city that God is always near at hand.

This verse no longer addresses the actual city, but instead talks about those who will be living in the city of Zion. Those who live there will be God's covenant people, for they are the ones purchased by the shedding of His blood. It is because of Jesus that those who make and honor covenants with God will become kings and priests to God. As their King, Jesus will continue to lead and guide those who live in Zion. Those who live in Zion, as priests (priestesses) will freely bring Him offerings of thanks.

SCRIPTURES

Psalm 87:3, Doctrine and Covenants 76:56-57, 66
(50-70)