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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

Glorious Things Are Sung of Zion

1. Glorious things are sung of Zion,
 Enoch's city seen of old,
 Where the righteous, being perfect,
 Walked with God in streets of gold.
 Love and virtue, faith and wisdom,
 Grace and gifts were all combined.
 As himself each loved his neighbor;
 All were one in heart and mind.

2. There they shunn'd the pow'r of Satan
 And observed celestial laws;
 For in Adam-ondi-Ahman
 Zion rose where Eden was.
 When beyond the pow'r of evil,
 So that none could covet wealth,
 One continual feast of blessings
 Crown'd their days with peace and health.

3. Then the tow'rs of Zion glittered
 Like the sun in yonder skies,
 And the wicked stood and trembled,
 Filled with wonder and surprise.
 Then their faith and works were perfect;
 Lo, they followed their great Head!
 So the city went to heaven,
 And the world said, "Zion's fled!"

4. When the Lord returns with Zion,
 And we hear the watchman cry,
 Then we'll surely be united,
 And we'll all see eye to eye.
 Then we'll mingle with the angels,
 And the Lord will bless his own.
 Then the earth will be as Eden,
 And we'll know as we are known.

Here Zion refers to the city of Enoch. Historically, the city of Enoch is the city all others are compared to, since it is the only city we know of that was translated and taken, land and all, into heaven. I don't know where the reference is that says their streets are paved with gold, but all scriptural references that talk about heavenly cities refer to them being paved with gold, so we can probably assume correctly that these streets are no different.

The people of the city of Enoch all possessed love (charity), virtue, faith, wisdom, spiritual gifts, and God's grace. Because they all loved each other as much as they loved themselves they became of one heart and one mind, or in other words, Zion.

People who have the goodness described in verse one shun or stay away from the things of Satan. By embracing the things of God they kept celestial laws. Adam-ondi-Ahman is just outside of where the garden of Eden was located. These Saints grew to be beyond the power of evil to destroy their happiness so that no one coveted wealth, and everyone enjoyed the blessings of the Lord continually. Their days were blessed (crowned) with peace and health.

The reference to the towers of the buildings in the city of Zion glittering or sparkling in the sun is figurative, and not literal. This statement is referring to the attractiveness of the city, the desire of people to be there. It was beautiful, both physically and spiritually. The wicked who were not willing to repent and join the city were afraid of the majesty and power of God's people, so "the wicked stood and trembled, filled with wonder and surprise."

Because the people in Enoch's city followed their great Head (Christ), their works became perfect, meaning they all became both justified and sanctified before God, and their sins were forgiven them. This is why God took the city and brought it home to Himself in heaven, and the wicked who were left behind exclaimed that "Zion has fled!" (run away)

At some point in the future Jesus will bring back the city of Enoch. The watchman is the prophet, and his "cry" is the word of the Lord. We will be told by the Prophet when this happens. When the city is returned to earth to be united with the Saints who are here, we will "see eye to eye," meaning we will understand each other equally well, because we will both be living the same laws and lifestyle. At that time we will have angels among us, and the Lord will bless "his own" or His people. Then the earth will become like it was during the time of the garden of Eden, and we will know God as well as God knows us.

Dutch melody, ca. 1710

TEXT

William W. Phelps, 1792-1872

SCRIPTURES

Moses 7:13, 16-21, 63-69, Isaiah 52:8