

Handel And The Messiah



**By
BRUCE RILEY**

THE MESSIAH

By

GEORGE FREDERICK HANDEL

The street lamps' warm and mellow glow,
Flash in water down below.
Lights grow dim in veils of mist;
Wet streets gleam ... But wait! What's this?

A wretched figure, dimly seen,
Limping with ungainly stride,
Wends its way, its toilsome way,
Through streets of London's riverside.

The complex rigging of the ships
Grows indistinct in skirts of rain;
A feeble glow, a dockside inn,
Invites relief from cold and pain.

But he stumbles on his tear-streaked way,
Shunning the hostile streets of day.

BRUCE RILEY

THE YEAR OF OUR ALMIGHTY ONE WAS 1741. Although the elderly gentleman's body was bent with unjust burdens, his soul soared on the wings of stately music, which, because of his palsied hand, seemed destined to remain imprisoned within the confines of his mind. Buoyed by melodies only he could hear, he continued on his night time wanderings.

His name was George Fredrick Handel, an English subject, who spoke with a German accent. He had descended from the pinnacle of glory and acclaim to this valley of night shadows haunted by malevolent spirits. He, whose music would transport his audiences to realms of angelic glory, could only glimpse his Saviour through the bars of an earthly hell.

For forty years Handel's music had thronged the concert halls of Europe and England's royalty and aristocracy. But his adoring public's sudden and inexplicable hostility had left Handel devastated and perplexed. His soaring melodies and angelic harmonies had served to fan flames of jealousy; and his less talented rivals and critics had contrived a catalogue of cruel and tasteless mischief.

Although Handel carried a few excess pounds, his appetite was not excessive for his time. Nevertheless, a cartoon appeared in a London paper in which Handel was depicted as a pig gorging greedily.

On the other hand, Samuel Johnson, a renowned poet, and Handel's contemporary, was famous for his gormandizing and guzzling. Yet the public looked upon Johnson's excesses with a mixture of good humour and affection. Today, Handel's and Johnson's earthly remains repose within the Poet's Corner of Westminster Abbey.

In addition, Handel's jealous colleagues, with the mentality of malicious juvenile vandals, hired Hoodlums to disrupt his performances.

Was this unreasonable opposition to Handel's music motivated by the lords of darkness who tamper with our culture for their own gross pleasures? Perhaps they saw in Handel's sacred oratorios an unendurable light, which might expose their own primitive offerings of what passes for art, and which appeals to the lower nature.

Extreme poverty followed, and to add to his misery, Handel suffered a cerebral haemorrhage which paralysed his right side. He was unable to walk and without the use of his right hand, he was unable to write even a note of music. Medical prognosis was grim and not a ray of hope was offered.

Handel journeyed to Aix-la-Chapell (Ex-la-Chapell), which is in Germany near the borders of Holland and Belgium. But the mineral waters were dangerously hot and doctors warned that an immersion of longer than persevere for nine hours at a time, and vitality slowly began to flow into his marrowless bones. His ability to walk finally returned. The frustration

of having a right hand that seemed to have a perverse will of its own could not suppress a burst of creativity that resulted in the composition of four operas in quick succession.

He once again rode a rising tide of popularity, but storm clouds were on the horizon. Queen Caroline, (consort of King George II) his staunch patroness, died, leaving him without a means of livelihood. England was seized in the icy grip of a brutal winter, and there was no means by which the theatre could be heated. Performances were cancelled and Handel sank deeper into debt.

Despair quenched his creative spark, and, during his 60th winter, he sought anonymity by wrapping himself within the night shadows of London. His ungainly stride bespoke of his past cerebral haemorrhage. As he paused before a church that loomed out of the darkness, a bitterness that bordered on rebellion welled up from the depths of his soul and he cried out, "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?"

Feeling like a hollow man without a soul, he wended his way back to his cheerless rooms. The parcel on the table failed to arouse interest, but nevertheless his listless fingers broke the seal.

The contents proved to be a libretto written by an obscure poet whose name was Charles Jennens. To aggravate Handel's already gloomy state of mind, this mediocre poet had the effrontery to suggest - even demand - that Handel immediately compose an oratorio to go with his libretto.

Handel felt a strong urge to set the parcel aside, but Jennens' parting words caught his eye: "**Yahweh has given me the words; He will give you the music.**"

As Handel leafed through the libretto, he was deeply touched as he read the words, "**He was despised and rejected of men.**" He felt a kinship with the rejected Saviour, and he read on. "**He will give you rest.**" The words seemed to glow on the pages and already he could hear angelic choirs sing, "**Wonderful, Counsellor, the mighty God, the everlasting Father, the Prince of Peace I know that my Redeemer liveth...**" With

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his pen knife, he sharpened a writing quill. His cold dreary room seemed to recede into obscurity as he was borne on the wings of heavenly music. Throughout the night his notes filled page after page with a decisiveness and authority he had never before experienced.

The following morning, his man servant placed a breakfast tray on his desk. He returned at noon to find the breakfast untouched and Handel still oblivious of his surroundings.

The faithful old servant became anxious as his master ignored all food. Occasionally, he would take a piece of bread, then absentmindedly let it fall.

Handel would write furiously, then play a few passages on the harpsichord. At times he would stride to and fro, and, with tears running down his cheeks, shout, "Hallelujah, Hallelujah!"

The thoroughly alarmed servant confided to a friend, "He said the gates of heaven have opened to him and Yahweh is there. I'm afraid he is going mad."

For twenty-nine days Handel laboured with little rest or food; then he fell into his bed, exhausted, with the greatest oratorio ever written on the table awaiting an audience. He slept soundly for seventeen hours, and his servant, now thinking he was dying, sent for a doctor. But before the doctor arrived, Handel was up and demanding food. As the doctor and servant looked on in wonderment, Handel laughed and joked as he ate half a ham. "If you've come for a friendly visit," he told the doctor, "well and good, but I won't have you poking over my carcass - I'm as sound as a bell"

In response to a cordial invitation from the Lord Lieutenant of Dublin, Handel departed the inhospitable London to have his Messiah performed for the first time in Dublin. He insisted that the proceeds go to charity saying, "It was a miracle that lifted me from the depths of despondency; now let it inspire the world." There was much distress in Ireland, and Handel's generous charitable gifts were sorely needed.

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He merged two choirs, and as anticipation grew, tickets were quickly sold out. In order to accommodate more people at Saint Andrews, women were requested not to wear hoops, and men not to bring swords.

On Good Friday, April 13th, 1742, crowds waited at the doors hours before the performance. The response of the audience was overwhelming, and when glowing reports reached England, there was a great clamour to have the Messiah performed in London. During the London performance, a dramatic incident occurred. At the singing of the Hallelujah Chorus, King George II rose to his feet, and the audience, as audiences have done for three and a half centuries, followed his example.

When his great, great granddaughter, Queen Victoria, heard the Hallelujah Chorus, she laid her crown aside in recognition of Yahshua, Who is above all kings, and stood with her husband, Prince Albert. This tradition of standing during the Hallelujah Chorus is still followed in all English speaking countries.

While Handel lived, he presented the Messiah every year, giving the proceeds to the Foundling Hospital, which was a hospital for orphaned babies. Handel wrote in his will that all royalties would continue to be given to the same charity.

A feature of 18th century England was a movement to aid those in distress, such as orphans, the sick, mothers-to-be, or those in prison. Handel involved himself in this movement and became governor of the Foundling Hospital. He also organized funds for the relief of destitute musicians and their families.

Although adversity continued to haunt Handel he never again succumbed to black despair. Age took its toll and Handel became blind, but his spirit remained undaunted. On the evening of April 6th, 1759, Handel, at the age of 74, was present at a performance of the Messiah. At the beginning of "**The Trumpet Shall Sound,**" he felt faint, and nearly collapsed. Those nearby supported him, and friends helped him home to bed. A few days later he said, "I should like to die on Good Friday," and on April the 13th, the anniversary of the first presentation of the Messiah, true to his wish,

the soul of George Frederick Handel became **“absent from the body and present with Yahweh”** (11 Corinthians 5:8) The continued Good Friday performance of the Messiah in London's Albert Hall is an indispensable part of our celebration of Easter.

Let us now consider the vision that transformed Handel's body, mind, and spirit - that caused him to exclaim with tears running down his cheeks, "The gates of heaven are opened to me and Yahweh is there. Hallelujah! Hallelujah!"

Since early childhood, he loved to hear stories about Yahshua, and especially treasured was the story of Yahshua being received up into heaven by a cloud of angels as seen by His disciples. Appropriately, the climax of the oratorio is the Hallelujah Chorus, and this is what Handel saw:

A triumphant angelic procession escorts Yahshua to the gates of Heaven. Another company of angels are awaiting their arrival. Then the angels who met Yahshua in the air, call to the angels who are waiting to receive them. (Psalm 24:7- 10) **"Lift up your heads, O ye gates; And be ye lifted up, ye everlasting doors: And the King of Glory will come in."**

The angels at the gates respond with the joyful question, **"Who is this King of glory?"**

The angels with Yahshua answer, **"Yahweh strong and mighty, Yahweh mighty in battle."**

Then, in the spirit of the ceremony of this august occasion, the joy of their command increases: **"Lift up your heads, O ye gates; And be ye lifted up, ye everlasting doors; And the King of glory will come in."**

Again the angels by the gates sing out with even greater joy: **"Who is the King of Glory? Who is the King of Glory?"** The angels with Yahshua reply with an ever increasing swell of triumphant song. **"Yahweh of Hosts, the Ever living of Hosts, He is the King of Glory, He is the King of Glory!"**

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The welcoming angels swing wide the gates and Yahshua passes through to the Father's abode. Then the angels who met Yahshua in the air, the angels who met Yahshua at the gates, and the angels around the throne of the Father all join in the Hallelujah Chorus. The Hallelujah Chorus ends with, "**And He shall reign forever and ever, King of Kings, and Ruler of Rulers, Hallelu-JAH! Hallelu JAH! Hallelu-JAH!**"

Bruce Riley, Omaha Nebraska - May 31st, 2003

QUICK FACTS

NAME

George Frideric Handel

OCCUPATION

Composer

BIRTH DATE

February 23, 1685

DEATH DATE

April 14, 1759

EDUCATION

University of Halle

PLACE OF BIRTH

Halle, Germany

PLACE OF DEATH

London, United Kingdom

ORIGINALLY

Georg Friedrich Händel

Georg Friedrich Haendel



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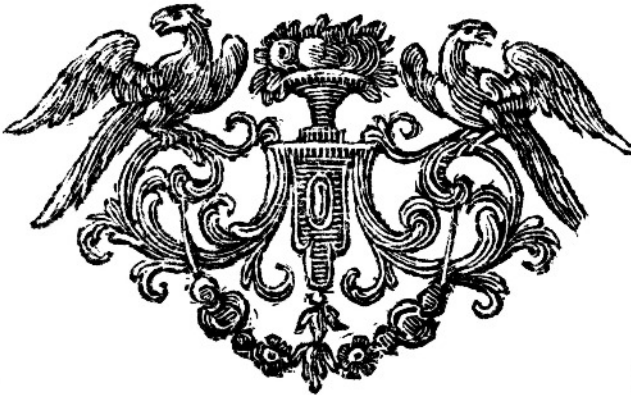
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