



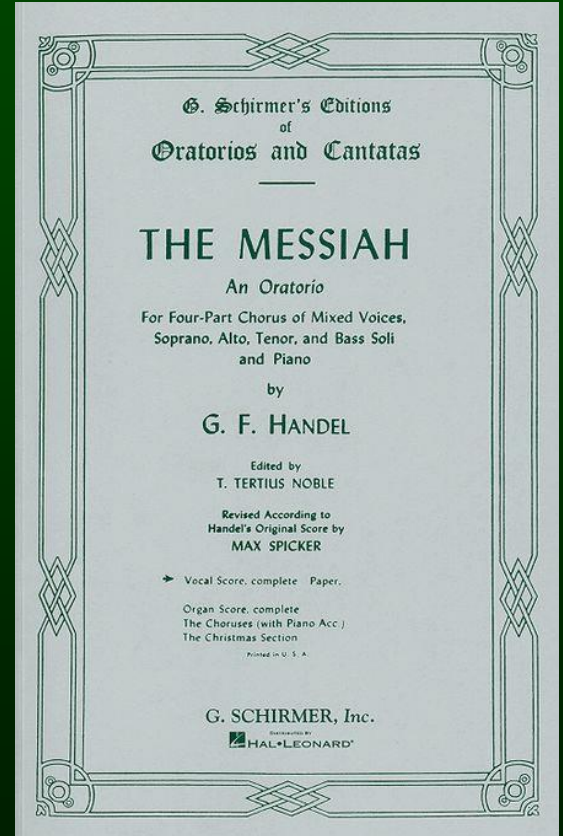
The Nativity, stained glass, St Leon Armenian Cathedral, Burbank CA

Handel's Messiah: Bringing Scripture to Life



Week 3 of 7

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A Friend in Need

- **2 events came together to change Handel's life**
- **They arrived when Handel was at his lowest point**
- **First, a friend, Charles Jennens, gave Handel a gift**
- **Jennens had written a story of the life of Christ**
- **Jennens selected Scriptures from the King James**
- **He had carefully arranged the verses like poetry**
- **Jennens' text could be easily set to music**

Faith, Hope, and Charity – 1 Cor.13:13

- **2nd, just then, Handel received a job offer**
- **A charity wanted him to compose music for a benefit**
- **Consider the timing & purpose of the 2 events:
to spread the good news of Christ and
to extend Christian love to the needy**
- **Consider the response they produced in Handel**
- **He was transformed from resignation & despair
to great joy and a super-human accomplishment**
- **The facts give compelling evidence of God at work**

A Super-Human Feat – Phil.4:13

- **Handel finished the Christmas portion in 6 days**
- **He was writing at about 100 times the speed of today's composers, without all their conveniences**
- **It was not just a brief inspiration for one song**
- **Handel sustained this pace for 3 weeks!**
- **Handel's biographers have concluded: it wasn't humanly possible without divine empowerment**

What Handel Experienced

- Handel tried to explain what he had experienced by quoting 2 Cor.12:2-3, in which Paul described his vision of heaven: “Whether I was in the body or out of my body when I wrote it, I do not know.”
- The consensus is that the amount of work, the high quality, combined with the short time required, makes Messiah the greatest accomplishment in the history of musical composition

A Vision of Heaven

- **For 3 weeks, Handel's servant delivered meals**
- **He returned later to find Handel's food untouched**
- **The servant would never forget one special day:
As he opened the door, Handel said with tears streaming, "I saw all of heaven before me!"**
- **The servant recalled the title on the page of music:
Hallelujah Chorus, based on Revelation, chapters 11 and 19 - the apostle John's vision of heaven**

Page from Hallelujah Chorus (British Library)



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A Timeless Classic

- **The 1st performance of Messiah: 1742 in Dublin**
- **It raised enough \$ to free 100 people from prison**
- **Musicians were less experienced than in London**
- **So Handel wrote the music in basic 4-part harmony**
- **It was designed for a small orchestra**
- **Only the trumpet and violin have solo parts**
- **The music has remained popular, partly because most church choirs and orchestras can play it well**
- **Each generation has discovered new treasures**

Messiah: Rejected, Then Accepted

- **Handel's popularity and success greatly increased after the Messiah, until he died 17 years later**
- **Even the church eventually accepted Messiah since it was only the singing of Scripture, no different than a special worship service.**
- **There was no acting, no costumes or scenery; nothing that could be considered sinful**

Another New Musical Form – Rom.8:28

- **The Bishop of the Church of England had unintentionally done Handel a favor; Messiah cost much less to produce than a sacred opera.**
- **The new musical form became known as the English oratorio. If you enjoy choir anthems and hymns during Sunday worship, thank Handel.**

It is More Blessed to Give – Acts 20:35

- **Handel continued giving large portions to charities**
- **He never forgot how the Lord had blessed him**
- **His giving became so great that centuries later, authors were writing that “Messiah has fed the hungry, clothed the naked, and provided for the orphan more than any musical production.”**
- **Perhaps no other composer has contributed so much to the relief of human suffering**

God So Loved the World - 1 Tim.2:3-4

- Even greater is the *spiritual* impact of Messiah on listeners worldwide, across the centuries
- The Messiah is a wonderful way into the Bible, especially for people who have never read one
- Messiah has probably done more than all the books written about the Bible, to convince people outside the church that God cares about them, too

I Wish to Make Them Better - Rom.12:1-8

- **After the first performance in London, Handel was congratulated for the excellent entertainment**
- **Handel responded by saying “I should be sorry if I only entertain them. I wish to make them better.”**
- **Handel died the day before Easter in 1759, soon after leading his final performance of Messiah**

Poet's Corner, Westminster Abbey, London



I know that my Redeemer liveth – Job 19:25

- Handel was buried in Westminster Abbey
- Over 3000 people attended His funeral
- Handel's statue at the grave holds Messiah



Joy of the Lord is Your Strength, Neh.8:10

- **Musical techniques found in the Messiah became highly influential. The great composers Haydn and Beethoven shared how indebted they felt to Handel**
- **In the years before the Messiah, he refused to give in to the setbacks, illness and financial hardships.**
- **His life shows that joy comes from relying on God**

Your King is Coming – John 12:15

- **The words of Luke 2 echo the words of Isaiah 40**
- **The song *For Unto Us* proclaims the king is coming**
- **We expect Messiah to be born with a trumpet fanfare**
- **But He was born in a lowly cattle shed. The next sounds we hear aren't trumpets, but tranquil strings**

The Little Hills Rejoice – Psalm 65:12

- **The setting for Pastoral Symphony is not a palace**
- **It is a Bethlehem hillside where David had written “The Lord is my shepherd” 1000 years earlier**
- **Our word *pastor* is from the Latin for shepherd**
- **Messiah speaks of flocks, lambs, and yokes**
- **This is a rural scene, in the quiet countryside**
- **The Messiah’s birth is good news for all people**
- **The news was given first to certain poor shepherds**

In the Presence of the Lord – 1 Sam.6:20

- **The angel appears; the shepherds are terrified**
- **Listen to the soprano's voice and the violins**
- **If you don't feel some chills here, you might want to check and see if you have a pulse**
- **The shepherds are suddenly in God's presence**
- **Old Testament prophets feared to even describe it**

He Gives Us the Victory – 1 Cor.15:57

- **The multitude of the heavenly host joined the angel**
- **The Greek word for host means “army”**
- **The “Lord of hosts” means God of armies**
- **God’s Son had arrived, prepared for battle**
- **But the message was about the Prince of Peace**
- **His love would give believers the victory over sin**



Pastoral Symphony (instrumental)

There Were Shepherds Luke 2:8

There were shepherds
abiding in the field,
keeping watch over
their flocks by night

Annunciation to the Shepherds
Limbourg Brothers, Bourges France, 1414





And, Lo, the Angel – Luke 2:9

**And, lo, the angel of the Lord
came upon them,
and the glory of the Lord
shone round about them:
and they were sore afraid.**



And the Angel Said – Luke 2:10-11

**And the angel said unto them,
Fear not: for, behold,
I bring you good tidings of great joy,
which shall be to all people.
For unto you is born this day
in the city of David a Savior,
which is Christ the Lord.**



And Suddenly – Luke 2:13

**And suddenly
there was with the angel
a multitude of the heavenly host,
praising God,
and saying:**



Glory to God - Luke 2:14

Glory to God in the highest,
and peace on earth,
good will towards men.

The Nativity

Gerard David, Belgium, 1510



The Purpose of His Birth

- **Jesus was born so that He could die for our sins**
- **God's plan before creation. Rev.13:8; 1 Pet.1:20**
- **The decision was not Pontius Pilate's. John 19:11**
- **The priests, who desperately wanted Jesus dead, said "but not during Passover." Matt.26:1-5**
- **Jesus, not His enemies, set the time for Calvary**
- **Jesus willingly went to the cross. Matt.26:53**

Rejoice in the Lord Always - Phil.4:4

- **Christ made His triumphal entry into Jerusalem not on a white horse, but on a small donkey**
- **Just as Zech.9:9 had foretold, 500 years earlier**
- **Consider what God did for us in Luke 2**
- **Handel leaves the amazed shepherds, and turns back to the prophets, who saw this in advance**
- **Their response was to rejoice**



Rejoice Greatly Zechariah 9:9-10

Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion;
shout, O daughter of Jerusalem:
behold, thy King cometh unto thee.
He is the righteous Savior
and he shall speak peace
unto the heathen.

Annunciation
Jan van Eyck, 1434



God is Able – Dan.3:17; 2 Co.9:8; Eph.3:20

- **Meekness is power under control,
the perfect balance of strength and compassion**
- **God was able to bring home the people of Judah**
- **God is strong: able to save, and keep us saved**
John 10:28-29; Jude 24; Heb.7:25
- **But God is also gentle**
Heb.5:2; 1 Ki.19:12; Matt:11:29; 2 Co.10:1

The Good Shepherd

John 10:11

- Christ is the Good Shepherd
- The Early Church thought of Jesus caring for them
- This is the image Handel wants us to remember

Christ the Good Shepherd
Catacomb of Priscilla, Rome, 250 AD



Yesterday, Today and Forever – Heb.13:8

- As Handel moves from Isaiah 40 to Matthew 11, he is making his statement of faith:
- Isaiah's gentle shepherd = John's Good Shepherd
- The two women sing *the same tune*:
 - “He shall feed his flock” (Old Testament)
 - = “Come unto him” (New Testament)
- The unchanging message: God gives us comfort
- His name is Jesus Christ



Then Shall the Eyes – Isaiah 35:5-6

**Then shall the eyes of the blind be opened,
and the ears of the deaf unstopped.**

**Then shall the lame man leap as a hart,
and the tongue of the dumb shall sing.**



He Shall Feed His Flock Isaiah 40:11

He shall feed his flock
like a shepherd: and he shall
gather the lambs with his arm,
and carry them in his bosom,
and gently lead those
that are with young.

Christ the Good Shepherd
Greek Icon





Come Unto Him – Matthew 11:28

**Come unto him,
all ye that labor,
that are heavy laden,
and he will give you rest
Take his yoke upon you,
and learn of him;
for he is meek and lowly of heart:
and ye shall find rest unto your souls**



His Yoke Is Easy Matthew 11:30

His yoke is easy,
and his burden
is light.

March

Limbourg Brothers, Bourges France, 1414



Thy Rod, Thy Staff, Thy Yoke

- The Lord's rod and staff comfort us. Psalm 23
- The oppressor's rod and yoke burden us. Isa.9:4
- Christ gave Himself as the sacrifice for our sins
- But in the end, the *government* will be on His shoulders, not the cross of Calvary
- Christ puts *His* yoke on us, which is easy to bear
- He harnesses together people from all walks of life, all over the world, from every generation, to serve as ministers of reconciliation. 2 Cor.5:18-21

The True Meaning of Christmas

- We celebrate Christmas as the birthday of Jesus, the anniversary of God coming to us in Christ
- This separates Christianity from all other religions: God chose us before creation; God is seeking us
- But the true meaning of Christmas is even more

The Greatest Gift

- Wise men came to Him bearing great gifts
- Christ came to us, so we can come to God
- Our sins are forgiven
- There's no greater gift

Adoration of the Magi
Gerard David, Belgium, 1520

