

**1) Handel's Messiah: Week 1 of 7**, John Kincaid, Autumn, 2018. How many of you have ever written a letter to a very special loved one (your fiancé, spouse, parents, child) where you poured your heart out expressing deep feelings about your relationship with that person? Maybe it took you several hours to get all your thoughts on paper, and when you were finished, you felt exhausted and drained. And while you were writing, nothing else mattered, because you were so focused on describing how thankful you felt for the special bond you shared with this person. Then you can begin to understand how Handel must have felt when he composed the Messiah.

**2) Handel's Thanksgiving.** This music is Handel's thank-you note to God. Why was he thankful? The gift is Jesus Christ – God so loved the world that He gave. Handel's thank-you was 250 pages; not only words, but beautiful music too. It only took 3 weeks to compose the Messiah. For 3 weeks, Handel never left his house, and he barely ate or slept. Then, instead of keeping this as a personal and private letter, Handel shared it with future generations around the world. Messiah is often performed as a benefit concert, just as it was the 1st time.

**3) Handel's Enduring Gift.** The 2 great composers of church music were Bach & Handel. Others come and go, but their music endures across the centuries. Handel's Messiah unites generations of singers, like no other music. My grandfather sang the Messiah using a 1912 edition of this book. I saw his copy; his pencil marks were still on the pages. Church bulletins from the performances were still tucked inside. This same book has been used by generations of singers. It is the book my wife used, and the book I used before we met. In fact, the couple who introduced me to my future wife said that she and I appreciated Bach & Handel more than anyone else in Greenwood so we were bound to appreciate each other. That's how we met.

**4) Messiah Has 3 Parts.** There are 3 sections in the Messiah. The Christmas portion will take us 3 weeks. The subject of Part 2 is Easter, Part 3 is the 2nd Coming of Christ.

**5) The Recording.** The Recording is by the Chicago Symphony Orchestra & Chorus, conductor Georg Solti in 1984. It's considered to be among the best performances available. It was 1 of the 1st Recordings put on CD. Bruce & Gail Schoonmaker teach voice at Furman & sing in our choir. God used them to minister to me at a crucial time in my life. 30 years ago, I asked Bruce which performance of Messiah he recommended, and this was it.

**6) Music & Theology in Harmony.** As you listen, notice how verses from Old & New Testaments are woven together. It's almost like they were written by the same author. Of course, we know that's true; the Holy Spirit wrote the whole book. People are often surprised to discover that certain verses do *not* appear side by side in the Bible. Instead they were written by different people separated by centuries, such as Isaiah & Matthew. The heart of Messiah's message is Isaiah chapter 40; Handel never strays far without returning home to this theme. Handel carefully measured each ingredient: the solos, male & female voices, soprano & tenor & full chorus. His musical interpretation blends with theology in perfect harmony. His goal, for every *voice* & every *instrument*, is to magnify the message of Scripture.

**7) The God of All Comfort.** Isa.40 begins with words of comfort, originally written for Judah. But the ultimate comfort of Isa.40 is the gospel. People in every nation have worshipped the one true God. It doesn't matter whether you live in 700 BC with Isaiah, or 1740 with Handel, or today: the Bible speaks. It doesn't matter whether you live in Israel or England or China: God has a message for you, in your unique circumstances. God's Word is truth, from age to age the

same. His unchanging truth brings wisdom and discernment into every new situation. We can look back and see that Isaiah's prophecy was fulfilled in Christ. But let's go back 7 centuries *before* Christ. What did Isaiah's words *originally* mean to Isaiah and his flock?

**8) Israel Under David and Solomon.** King David & his son King Solomon led Israel during its golden age. David was just a boy when he killed the giant. But the key point of that story: *God* gave David the victory. Not because David was big & strong, but because David had *faith*. Not by might nor by power but by my Spirit, saith the Lord of hosts. If the unchanging God is still at work today (& He is), then if *we* trust Him, He is able to deliver *us* from the giants *we* face. After King Solomon died, the leaders turned *away* from God; the nation of Israel split.

**9) The Divided Kingdom.** The kingdom was divided in 2 parts: the northern region was still called Israel. But *they* chose a king who did *not* descend from David. The southern region called Judah included Jerusalem, with the sons of David as their kings. Red outline = Israel today.

**10) Assyrian Captivity.** Assyrians conquered northern Israel & took them captive in 722 BC. Isaiah ministered in the southern kingdom (Judah) during that time. People of Judah dodged a bullet. They believed it was a miracle, that God had protected them. But they believed this because they put their faith in *their* king and the *Temple*. They knew *their* king descended from David, and the Messiah would be a son of David. Judah expected the Messiah to descend from their king. But *God's* plan was the virgin birth. Judah expected the Messiah to live in their Temple building when He came. But *God's* plan was the indwelling of the Holy Spirit.

**11) Isaiah's Ministry.** The people of Judah were just going through the motions of religion. They didn't realize that God was about to judge them. They didn't see themselves as sinners. Isaiah confronted them by holding up a mirror to reveal their sin. James 1:25 compares God's Law to a perfect mirror. God's Law reveals that we are dirty and need a Savior to cleanse us. Isaiah called Judah to repent, but they ignored Isaiah – they thought they *were* clean.

**12) Babylonian Captivity.** Judah continued in sin for 135 years. When the Assyrians took the northern kingdom into captivity, this was a warning from God. Finally in 586 BC, God raised up Nebuchadnezzar & the Babylonian army to carry out God's judgment. The city of Jerusalem, including the Temple, was wiped out. The people of Judah were taken to Babylon as slaves.

**13) How Could This Happen?** The people of Judah were stunned. They couldn't understand why God allowed this. They had been trusting in the Temple like a magic charm. And except for Daniel, his 3 friends, Ezekiel & Jeremiah, they stopped talking about God.

**14) Where Was God in All This?** Where was God when *you* experienced tragedy? Where was God when the hurricanes hit, or when the twin towers fell? When we endure suffering, there is a built-in temptation. We begin to question & doubt; maybe I did something to deserve this.

Maybe I pushed God too far this time; He doesn't love me anymore. If God still loved me, I wouldn't be going through *this*. Maybe He's left me for *good* this time, and He's never coming back. Maybe there is no God after all; how could a loving God allow this evil? That's exactly what the devil *wants* you to believe. Satan's favorite weapons are doubt and discouragement.

The Lord said "I will never leave you. I am with you always." Nothing can snatch you out of His hand. Nothing can separate you from His love. We know it's true. Even so, have you ever *felt* abandoned by God? If so, then you understand what they were feeling in Babylon.

**15) The Light Shines.** Then we see a glimmer of light shining in the darkness. Isaiah 40 opens with these words of comfort, hope, encouragement. God is telling Judah that *their* story has a *happy* ending. God promised to bring them home, over a century *before* the exile began.

**16) The Journey Home.** The captivity finally ended; the people of Judah were free to go. It must have reminded them how their ancestors felt in the Exodus. But going home to Judah meant they had to cross the Arabian desert. Most of these people had been born in captivity during the 70 years. The only home they had ever *known* was Babylon. They had never even *seen* Solomon's Temple. There would have been few people alive who remembered Judah.

### **17) A Highway in the Wilderness**

It was here that they found comfort in God's Word. Isaiah 40, over 100 years earlier, promised a highway. There would be no barriers on this trip, no hurdles. When their ancestors left Egypt, they wandered until they died. But *this* was not the Exodus. *This* trip had God's blessing. 70 years earlier, the people of Judah felt *forsaken* by God. But going *back* to Judah, they were *sure* God was with them. This road was also God's highway to Jerusalem. That was the best part of the good news: by going home, God's glory would be revealed through the birth of the Messiah.

### **18) All Flesh Shall See It**

The unbelievers in Babylon had mocked God, scoffed at God. They were like the people while Noah built the ark. They said "If your God is so great, why are you in captivity?" "*Your* God was not able to protect his temple from *our* army." But *now*, the people of Judah would *reclaim* their land. God was able to use even *this* situation to bring glory to His name. Now the record would be set straight. Even the nations who *doubted* God's power would see it confirmed.

### **19) Musical Word Pictures**

Handel's music paints the same picture as the Scripture. I will just mention a few examples: In *Every Valley*, the music notes climb on the word "exalted". The word "low" rolls down to the bottom of the hill. The music for the word "crooked" twists and turns. The words "plain" and "straight" are long & smooth notes. The music of Messiah magnifies God's Word.

**20) Hallelujah Chorus.** The song *And the Glory* has been called the Hallelujah Chorus of the Christmas portion. God has faithfully guarded the transmission of His Word from the time of Isaiah 2700 years ago, down to us. This Scripture has blessed over 100 generations. Along the way, God created a great gift of music in Handel. This gift is for *our* blessing & God's *glory*.

♪ **21) Comfort Ye – Isaiah 40:1-3** Comfort ye, comfort ye my people, saith your God. Speak ye comfortably to Jerusalem, and cry unto her that her warfare is accomplished, that her iniquity is pardoned. The voice of him that crieth in the wilderness, Prepare ye the way of the LORD, make straight in the desert a highway for our God.

### ♪ **22) Every Valley – Isaiah 40:4**

Every valley shall be exalted, and every mountain & hill made low: the crooked straight & the rough places plain.

### ♪ **23) And the Glory – Isaiah 40:5**

And the glory of the LORD shall be revealed, and all flesh shall see it together: for the mouth of the LORD hath spoken it.

**24) Accountability.** We are Christ's ambassadors. We are accountable to Him. He entrusted us with the faith, the Gospel. Jude 3, 2 Cor.4:7 We have a responsibility as stewards, as ministers of reconciliation. The Messiah calls us to live a life worthy of our high calling. We prepare for Him by living pure, righteous and holy lives. 2 of God's prophets, Haggai & Malachi, brought this truth to Judah. They preached in Jerusalem after the return from Babylon.

They called on Judah to give *acceptable* worship to God. Heb.12:26 quotes Hag.2:6 (the verse for the next song) and develops the same themes as Haggai: Make every effort to be holy. God will shake the heavens and the earth, God is a consuming fire. It's like cleaning house before company comes, except the guest is God's Son. The Jews needed to get their house in order.

**25) All Have Sinned.** Haggai & Malachi were very grateful for their Messiah. But they were keenly aware of their own sinfulness. Their call to repent reminds us of John the Baptist. Matt.3:1-3 Haggai encouraged the people of Judah to rebuild the Temple. He focused on the *house* of worship. Malachi is concerned about the *quality* of the worship. This message still applies to us, over 2000 years later, as we prepare for the Messiah to return.

**26) Faded Glory.** Being free in Jerusalem was better than being a slave in Babylon. So they were glad to be back, but Jerusalem was in ruins. Like the cleanup after a hurricane, they had to start over from scratch. Most of them were too young to remember the former glory. They were almost as disillusioned as their ancestors had been when the Babylonians *destroyed* the temple. They couldn't imagine the beauty & glory that the prophets foretold. We've seen construction sites. The architect can visualize a beautiful building, but the *rest* of us can only see mud.

**27) Rebuilding the Temple.** Haggai told Judah to clean up & restore the house of worship. It was a long process; decades. When it was all done, it looked like a poor copy. Haggai told them that one day, the glory would outshine even *Solomon's* temple. Haggai reminded them that God is there with them to sustain them through the "muddy" part of the project.

**28) Malachi and the Priests.** Malachi was concerned that priests were turning religion into a performance, like actors. They were fighting for power and position. They were corrupt and insincere. The tribe of Levi held the priesthood in ancient times. All priests were considered "sons of Levi", but some sons had more power than others. Malachi's group, called the Levites, had the blue collar jobs of servants and singers in the temple. Malachi's point is that the sons of Aaron failed to represent God's people. These priests didn't take their responsibility seriously. They gave God their spoiled leftovers. Their gifts were impure, and so were their hearts.

**29) And He Shall Purify.** Malachi, Haggai & all of God's prophets saw a glimpse of the future glory. The Messiah *will* come to purify the hearts of *every* priest. All Christians are priests. <sup>1 Pet.</sup> 2:5-9; Heb.10:19-25 The refiner's fire removes the inner impurities. None of us can survive God's judgment without His grace. We *gladly* obey God out of *gratitude* because we love Him. It's easy for us to go through the motions at Christmas. Take Malachi's advice – give your *best* to God. He reached out to you; He calls *you* to reach out to *others* as His minister to a lost world.

♪ **30) Thus Saith the LORD, Haggai 2:6-7** Thus saith the LORD of hosts; Yet once, a little while, and I will shake the heavens & the earth, the sea & the dry land; And I will shake all nations & the desire of the nations shall come

♪ **31) The Lord, Whom Ye Seek – Malachi 3:1** The Lord, whom ye seek, shall suddenly come to his temple, even the messenger of the covenant, whom ye delight in: behold, he shall come, saith the LORD of hosts.

♪ **32) But Who May Abide - Malachi 3:2**

But who may abide the day of his coming? And who shall stand when he appeareth? For he is like a refiner's fire.

♪ **33) And He Shall Purify - Malachi 3:3**

And he shall purify the sons of Levi, that they may offer unto the LORD an offering in righteousness.