

Libretto of Handel's "Messiah"

(without the repetitions)

Introduction:

Georg Friderich Handel composed the work, which he called "Messiah" (*NOT "THE" Messiah*), in twenty-three days during 1741. He then took the best part of a year before he fully perfected the orchestration, and then finally he presented it as a complete work, publicly, in concert, (just after Easter) on 13th April 1742 in Dublin (Ireland). This was, of course, not a Christmas-tide offering, but around Easter, which is when this work is traditionally performed in the part of the world where it was written. It was also performed in its entirety.

If you, dear reader, should find some of the words here unfamiliar, it is because in the present days, certain pieces composed by Handel to the texts he chose from the bible (which he regularly read) are seldom, if ever, performed. This is because those who are wiser than he believe that they need not be included in the repertoire.

There appears to be another version about how Handel got the texts... which says he received them from someone else... a close personal friend. Whichever version is correct, I believe it is a fabulous work, and truly inspired of God.

My printed score, edited by Ebenezer Prout, and often referred to as the "Schirmer" edition, points out which pieces are left out by tradition - what one today can call the "traditions of men" because the composer specifically wrote the music for those texts. This writer sees a corollary between those ignored pieces, and the tendency at this end of the twentieth century, for many God-fearing people to ignore many other scriptures which also paint our sovereign God in an unpalatable form to them, when He is compared with their understanding of a god (with a little "g") who is not judgmental towards his children at any time. This is, I believe, one of the great tragedies of this present period of time, when so many seem to have spiritual blinkers on.

When one reads this libretto, composed of many scriptures taken from here, there and everywhere, but not edited except in minor forms as poetic paraphrases occasionally to suit the composer's music, one cannot help but be struck with the falsity of teaching by many modern theologians and churchmen who say that one cannot piece a scripture from here with another from there in support of a belief. Where would Handel have been if such an unbelief in the promptings of the Holy Spirit had been current in his day?

From my understanding from my very early years (I was 63 in January 1998), Handel specifically picked the universally used English translation of the time - which is correctly termed the "Authorised Version" - because of its inherent beauty and poetry, to compose his music to, even though he was a German by descent.

I hope you enjoy this publication.

The three sections which follow are:

firstly the libretto reset as a continuous and related scripture,
Finally the scripture references, against each verse...

Libretto as continuous scripture

"Comfort ye, My people", saith your God. Speak ye comfortably to Jerusalem and cry unto her, that her warfare be accomplished, that her iniquity is pardoned. The Voice of him that cried in the wilderness, "Prepare ye the way of the Lord, make straight in the desert a highway for our God".

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

Thus saith the Lord of Hosts; yet once, in a little while, and I will shake the earth, the sea, the dry land, all nations, I'll shake and the desire of all nations shall come.

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. But who may abide the day of His coming? And who shall stand when He appeareth? For He is like a refiner's fire, and He shall purify the sons of Levi, that they may offer unto the Lord an offering in righteousness.

Behold, a virgin shall conceive, and bear a son, and they shall call His name Emmanuel, "God with us".

O thou, that tellest good tidings to Zion, get thee up into the high mountain: O thou that tellest good tidings to Jerusalem, lift up thy voice with strength: lift it up, be not afraid: and say unto the cities of Judah, "Behold your God!". O thou that tellest good tidings to Zion, arise, shine, for thy light is come, and the glory of the Lord is risen, risen upon thee. For behold, darkness shall cover the earth, and gross darkness the people: but the Lord shall arise upon thee, and His glory shall be upon thee. And the Gentiles shall come to thy light, and kings to the brightness of thy rising.

The people that walked in darkness have seen a great light, and they that dwell in the land of the shadow of death, upon them hath the light shined. For unto us a Child is born, unto us a Son is given, and the government shall be upon His shoulder, and His Name shall be called Wonderful, Counselor, The Mighty God, The Everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace.

There were shepherds abiding in the field, keeping watch over their flocks by night. 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 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 Saviour, which is Christ the Lord". And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host, praising God, and saying..."Glory to God, Glory to God in the highest: and peace on earth. Good will towards men, good will towards men."

Rejoice, rejoice greatly, rejoice, O daughter of Zion! Shout, O daughter of Jerusalem! Behold, thy King cometh unto thee! He is the righteous Saviour, and He shall speak peace unto the heathen; behold thy King cometh to thee! Then shall the eyes of the blind be opened, and the ears of the deaf unstopped. Then shall the lame man leap as an hart, and the tongue of the dumb shall sing. He shall feed His flock like a shepherd, and He shall gather the lambs with His arm, and gently lead those that are with young. Come unto Him, all ye that labour; come unto Him ye 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, His burthen is light.

Behold the Lamb of God, that taketh away the sin of the world. He was despised, despised and rejected, rejected of men; a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief. He gave His back to the smiters, and His cheeks to them that plucked off the hair: He hid not His face from shame and spitting. Surely, surely He hath borne our griefs, and carried our sorrows; He was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities, the chastisement of our peace was upon Him. And with His stripes we are healed.

All we like sheep, all we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned, every one to his own way, and the Lord hath laid on Him the iniquity of us all. All they that see Him, laugh Him to scorn; they shoot out their lips and shake their heads, saying: "He trusted in God that He would deliver Him; if He delight in Him, let Him deliver Him".

Thy rebuke hath broken His heart; He is full of heaviness. He looked for some to have pity on Him, but there was no man, neither found He any to comfort Him. Behold and see if there be any sorrow like unto His sorrow.

He was cut off out of the land of the living: for the transgression of Thy people was He stricken. But Thou didst not leave His soul in hell, nor didst Thou suffer Thy Holy One to see corruption.

Lift up your heads, O Ye gates, and be ye lift up, ye everlasting doors, and the King of Glory shall come in. Who is the King of Glory? Who is this King of Glory? The Lord strong and mighty, the Lord mighty in battle, the Lord of Hosts. He is the King of Glory, the Lord of Hosts.

Unto which of the angels said He at any time, "Thou art My Son, this day have I begotten Thee?" Let all the angels of God worship Him. Thou art gone up on high; Thou hast led captivity captive, and received gifts for men; yea even for Thine enemies, that the Lord God might dwell among them.

The Lord gave the word: great was the company of the preachers. How beautiful are the feet of them that preach the gospel of peace, and bring glad tidings, glad tidings of good things! Their sound is gone out into all lands, and their words to the ends of the world.

Why do the nations so furiously rage together? Why do the people imagine a vain thing? Let us break their bonds asunder, and cast away their yokes from us. He that dwelleth in heaven shall laugh them to scorn; the Lord shall have them in derision. Thou shalt break them, Thou shalt dash them in pieces like a potter's vessel.

Halleluiah! For the Lord God Omnipotent reigneth. The kingdom of this world is become the Kingdom of our Lord, and of His Christ, and He shall reign for ever and ever. King of Kings, and Lord of Lords, and He shall reign for ever and ever. Halleluiah!

I know that my Redeemer liveth, and that He shall stand at the latter day upon the earth. And though worms destroy this body, yet in my flesh shall I see God. For now is Christ risen from the dead, the first fruits of them that sleep. Since by man came death, by man also came the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive. Behold, I tell you a mystery; we shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. The trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised, the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed. For this corruptible must put on incorruption. The trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed.

Then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written, "death is swallowed up in victory". O death, O death, where is thy sting? O grave, O grave, where is thy victory? The sting of death is sin, and the strength of sin is the law. But thanks be to God, Who giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ. If God be for us, who can be against us? Who shall lay anything to the charge of God's elect? It is God that justifieth. Who is he that condemneth? It is Christ that died, yea rather, that is risen again, Who is at the right hand of God, Who makes intercession for us, Who is at the right hand of God.

Worthy is the Lamb that was slain, and hath redeemed us to God by His blood, to receive power, and riches, and wisdom, and strength, and honour, and glory, and blessing!

Blessing, and honour, glory, and power, be unto Him that sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb, for ever and ever,

Amen.

Where Handel got the words from...

Part One

1. *Instrumental item without words*
- 2, 3, 4. *Isa 40: 1 - 5*
5. *Hag 2: 6-7; Mal 3: 1*
6. *Mal 3: 2*
7. *Mal 3: 13*
8. *Isa 7: 14; Mat 1: 23*
9. *Isa 40: 9*
10. *Isa 40: 2-3*
11. *Isa 9: 2*
12. *Isa 9: 6*
13. *instrumental item without words*
14. *Lk 2: 8, 9*
15. *Lk 2: 10-11*
- 16, 17. *Lk 2: 13, 14*
18. *Zech 9: 9-10*
19. *Isa 35: 5-6*
20. *Isa 40: 11; Mat 11: 28-29*
21. *Mat 11: 30*

Part Two

22. *Jn 1: 29*
23. *Isa 53: 3; 50: 6*
- 24-26. *Isa 53: 4- 6*
- 27,28. *Ps 22: 7, 8*
29. *Ps 69: 20*
30. *Lam 1: 12*
31. *Isa 53: 8*
32. *Ps 16: 10*
33. *Ps 24: 7-10*
- 34,35. *Heb 1: 5, 6*
36. *Ps 68: 18*
37. *Ps 68: 11*
38. *Rom 10: 15*
39. *Rom 10: 18*
40. *Ps 2: 12*
- 41,42. *Ps 2: 3, 4*
43. *Ps 2: 9*
44. *Rev 19: 6; 11: 15; 19: 16*

Part Three

45. *Job 19: 25, 26; 1 Cor 14: 20*
- 46.; *1 Cor 15: 21*
- 47-51. *1 Cor 15: 51 - 57*
52. *Rom 8: 31, 33, 34*
53. *Rev 5: 12,13*

Did you know that a tradition exists where the audience always stands during the playing of the "Halleluiah Chorus" ?,

Whether you do know this - or not - you could be pleasantly surprised at the wealth of feedback on this subject that Tom Lumb of Wellington (New Zealand) has unearthed from around the globe via the internet. Tom is the librarian of Wellington's "Festival Singers".

To find out, visit his website at <http://www.festival-singers.org.nz/haleluia.htm>

***If you like "Messiah",
why don't you take a look at a late 20th-century oratorio called
"The Jerusalem Passion"
which you can find by visiting its private "fan" website at
www.jerusalem Passion.org***